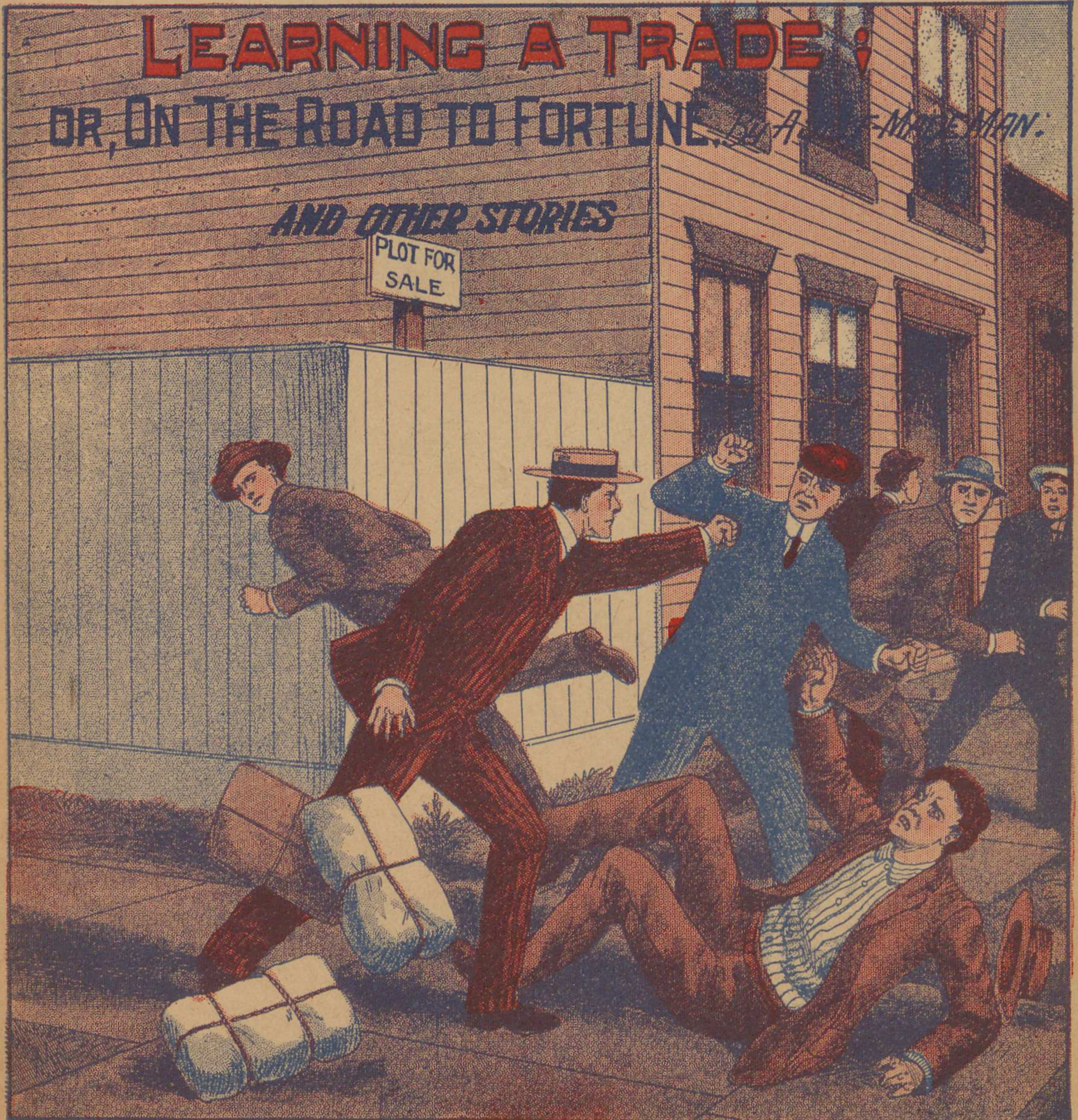


FAME AND FORTUNE WEEKLY

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.



Biff! Bob's fist landed like a sledgehammer on the jaw of one of his tormentors, and the boy measured his length on the ground. The plucky lad's prowess staggered the rest of the bunch, and they scattered like sheep.

FAME AND FORTUNE WEEKLY

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LEARNING A TRADE

OR, ON THE ROAD TO FORTUNE

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.—The Stranger.

"Hello, bub!"

Bob Howard, a good-looking but not over well-dressed boy of seventeen, looked up as he was in the act of dropping several packages into the bow of a small sailboat, moored to a low landing wharf which projected a few feet into the sluggish waters of a wide creek on the outskirts of the busy little town of Cadiz, in a Western State, and beheld a strange man looking down at him. The stranger, who was rather shabbily dressed, was about thirty-five years of age, of a dark, sun-burned complexion, with sinister-looking eyes, an insolent expression, and a mouth shaded by a deep, black mustache. Bob took an instinctive dislike to him on the spot.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked in an impatient tone and not over politely, for he was in a hurry to be off.

"You live around here, I guess?" said the man, fixing him with his eye, and there was a baleful look in it that the lad did not at all fancy.

"I do," he answered, shortly.

"On t' other side of the creek, peshaps?" said the stranger, with a significant glance at the boat.

"Yes."

"Pretty well acquainted in this neighborhood, I s'pose?"

"What of it?"

The man flashed a disagreeable look at him, then he said:

"Maybe you know a man around here named Hiram Bland?"

Bob eyed the stranger with new interest and curiosity. Hiram Bland was his uncle, and Bob lived with him in a small cottage, the peaked roof of which could be plainly seen through the trees from that spot. Mr. Bland, who was an old man of sixty, was a pronounced recluse. He spent most of his time in his room, and his nephew, who was chief cook and bottle washer of the establishment, saw very little of him except at meal times. He had no friends, or even acquaintances—didn't seem to want any—consequently he had no visitors. The only persons who called at the cottage were Bob's own cronies. They never

went in unless Bob responded to their whistle, and not always then. Bob, therefore, was not a little surprised to find a stranger, and not a very desirable looking one at that, asking for his uncle.

"I do," he replied to the man's last question.

"Good. You are the lad for my money," said the stranger in a tone of great satisfaction. "Where does he live?"

"What do you want with him?"

"That's my business, sonny. Just tell me where he lives and I'll give you a dime."

"Mr. Bland doesn't receive visitors," replied Bob.

"Eh?"

"I said he doesn't see callers."

"How do you know he doesn't?" asked the man sharply.

"I ought to know."

"Why ought you?"

"Because I live with him."

The stranger whistled softly and looked more narrowly at the boy.

"You live with him, eh?"

"Yes."

"Since when?"

"What is that to you?"

The stranger pulled a cigar out of his upper vest pocket, bit off the end, and stuck the weed between his teeth. Then he struck a match on his leg and lighted it.

"Sonny, who are you anyway?"

"I don't think that need interest you," replied Bob.

"Maybe it does, and maybe it doesn't. So Hiram Bland lives across the creek, in that house, maybe, I see from here? Perhaps you'll take me across in your boat—you seem ready to start?"

"I'll take you. Step in. If you expect to see Mr. Bland I'm afraid you'll be disappointed," said the boy as he untied the mooring rope and pushed the boat out from the wharf.

The stranger chuckled as he took his place on one of the seats, and then smoked away in silence. Bob hoisted the little sail, and, with the sheet in his hand, he moved the rudder a bit, the craft glided around in a semi-circle and started for the opposite side of the creek. The stranger present-

ed his back toward him, and the boy studied it, mainly because he had to look in that direction anyway.

"I wonder who he is, and why he wants to see my uncle? Must be some old acquaintance of by-gone years. Mr. Bland seems to have shaken all his former friends, for he never writes a letter nor receives one. How then was this man able to trace him to this locality? I don't like his looks for a cent. He hasn't got an honest face. His photo wouldn't look out of place in a rogue's gallery. He seems to feel pretty confident of seeing Mr. Bland. Well, it's nothing to me, but it's my opinion that my uncle will decline the honor of an interview. If he won't make friends with the respectable people in the neighborhood, it is hardly likely he'll hold any communication with this chap. I suppose I'll have to take him back to the wharf, for it's a long walk to town around by the road."

Here Bob ran the boat alongside the landing on the other side of the creek, let the sail down with a run, and stepping ashore, ran forward and grabbed the mooring line, which he attached to a ring and secured with a sailor's hitch. The stranger required no invitation to disembark. Bob found him on the landing when he turned around.

"That's the house, is it?" said the man, nodding toward the cottage that stood on the other side of a row of trees.

"That's where Mr. Bland lives," replied the boy.

"Thanks, sonny. Here's the dime."

He tossed the coin into Bob's hand and started off.

"Hold on," said Bob.

"What do you want?"

"You'll have to wait till I load up with these packages."

"What's the use? I don't need no guide now. I'll announce myself."

"You can if you want to, but it won't do you much good."

"Why not?"

"I told you that he won't see any one. He never does."

"Oh, he'll see me," replied the stranger, in a confident tone.

"If he does it will surprise me."

The man laughed in an unpleasant way.

"You're young sonny. You've got lots to learn."

"Say, who are you, anyway?" asked Bob, curiously, using the very words the man had addressed to him on the wharf.

"I don't think that need interest you, sonny," replied the stranger, with a sardonic grin, giving him back his own answer.

"All right, you don't have to tell me. Go on and see if you will be admitted to the house," said Bob, turning his back on him and taking the packages from the boat.

With a chuckle the man proceeded toward the cottage, smoking his cigar with the utmost nonchalance. On the whole, Bob was glad to be saved the trouble of announcing the visitor to his uncle, who, he felt certain, would be displeased at him for not sending the stranger about his business.

"When he finds that Mr. Bland will not receive him, then, perhaps, he'll be willing to haul

in his horns and return to town," thought Bob. The boy was in no hurry to reach the cottage while the stranger was there. After carrying the packages a few steps, Bob laid them down under a spreading tree and seated himself beside them. He had an idea that the stranger would be back in a short time, after an unsuccessful attempt to gain admission to the cottage, and would want him to take him back to the wharf, so he thought it would save time to wait for him. Five—ten—fifteen minutes passed, but the stranger did not return, and the boy grew impatient.

"I wonder if he's camped out in the front yard waiting for me because he has found that he couldn't get inside without help?" thought Bob. "I'd let him wait with all the pleasure in the world, only I'm in a hurry to get dinner. May be I could slip in the back way without attracting his attention. I'll try."

Bob caught up his bundles and started for the house. When he passed through the trees he saw no sign of the stranger about. He laid the bundles down beside the kitchen doorstep and walked around front. The man was not there. Bob found the front door and found it locked, as it usually was.

"Can it really be that my uncle has let that chap in? It's mighty strange if he has. He'll be the first visitor Mr. Bland has seen for a mighty long time. The fellow seemed sure of getting an interview. If he's got it he must be some particular old friend of Mr. Bland's, though he doesn't look to me like the kind of person my uncle would care to talk to. Well, I'll soon find out if he's got in," said the boy.

He returned to the rear, unlocked the kitchen door, picked up his bundles and entered. Placing the packages on the table he opened the door leading into the hallway connecting with the sitting-room, and listened. He heard a low murmur of voices, but the sounds did not come from upstairs, which meant Mr. Bland's own room.

"Well, I'll be jiggered; the chap has not only got in, but Mr. Bland has taken him to his own room—a most unheard-of circumstance," thought Bob, as he listened to the sounds of conversation above. "Well, it's no business of mine what my uncle does in his own house. He's the boss of the ranch. Only it seems funny he would hobnob with that chap. I must get dinner ready, for it's getting on to noon."

He returned to the kitchen, started the draught in the stove, and began preparations for the chief meal of the day.

CHAPTER II.—Tom Barker.

Bob had just put some potatoes on to boil when the bell connected with his uncle's room rang. That was a signal to the boy that he was wanted upstairs by Mr. Bland. He lost no time in answering it. He wondered if he would now learn the identity of the stranger. He found his uncle standing at the head of the stairs.

"Bob, I have a visitor—the man you brought across the creek—and he will dine with us. Make your preparations accordingly," said Mr. Bland.

"All right, Uncle Hiram," replied the boy.

Mr. Bland turned away and Bob returned to the kitchen.

"The man must be an old friend for Mr. Bland to invite him to dinner, unless he invited himself, which wouldn't surprise me in the least. He seems to be nervy enough to do anything. I wonder what he wants here? He looks pretty shabby, as if he was hard up. Perhaps his object is to touch my uncle for some money. Mr. Bland isn't one of the giving up kind. What he has he holds on to mighty tight. Well, I can't say that I blame him. My uncle has no visible means of support, and I guess he needs all he has for us to live on. I wish he'd let me go to work, but he won't. He says there ain't any necessity for it, and he wants me around the premises."

Bob peeled two more potatoes and put them in the pot, after which he went on with his other preparations for the meal. Within an hour everything was ready, and he rang the bell provided for that purpose. Dinner was always served in the large kitchen, for there was no dining-room to the cottage, the room which might have been used as such being furnished as a sitting-room, while the big room on the other side of the hall, evidently intended for the parlor, was not used or furnished at all. The room was kept locked all the time, and with a Yale lock, too, as if there was something valuable in it instead of nothing but emptiness. The blinds were kept closed, and it was never cleaned. Once Bob suggested that he ought to sweep it, but Mr. Bland turned down his suggestion in so decided a way that he never repeated it. In answer to the bell, Hiram Bland piloted his visitor to the kitchen. The stranger nodded at Bob with a self-satisfied grin.

"Bob," said Mr. Bland, "this is your cousin, Thomas Barker. Barker, this is Bob Howard."

"Glad to meet you, Bob," said the visitor, with another grin. "Hope we'll be friends."

Bob had his doubts about that. The dislike he had taken to Barker as a stranger was not dissipated by the introduction. He had heard of his cousin, Tom Barker, though he had never seen him till now, and Barker's record was not one to be proud of. He was the black sheep and ne'er-do-well of the family. A rolling stone who was always on the move. How he lived was a mystery, as he was never known to work, still as he was not heard from for years at a time it was quite possible he might have sought employment when forced to. At any rate he had been known to look prosperous at odd times, though he never would tell how such good luck came to him. At present his appearance was decidedly against him. He had been dead to the world, as far as Mr. Bland and Bob were concerned, for about five years, and whether he had revealed his movements during that time to the former, Bob had no means of knowing. Judging from his character and appearance the boy was willing to bet that Tom Barker had hunted his uncle up for the purpose of negotiating a loan.

"And he'll get it, too—in the neck," thought Bob, as he took his seat at the table and helped himself.

"What are you doing for a living, Bob?" asked Barker, after the meal had progressed for a while.

"He's working for me," spoke up Mr. Bland.

"Is that all?" replied the visitor. "I should think——"

"It's quite enough," interrupted Mr. Bland. "It takes a good part of his time, and I need him around."

"But you won't live forever. You ought to give him a chance to learn a trade so that——"

"He don't need no trade," replied Mr. Bland brusquely.

"Oh, he don't? Then you must be worth money that you intend to leave him."

"I ain't worth nothing," said Mr. Bland, hastily.

"How do you live, then?"

"It doesn't cost much to live around here."

"Do you own the cottage?"

"Maybe I do, and maybe I don't. It ain't worth much, anyway."

"I guess you're well fixed," grinned Barker. "My old man, your brother, told me you were worth more than all the rest of the family lumped together."

"Your father didn't know what he was talking about," snapped Mr. Bland. "Otis always was in the habit of going off half cocked, and saying things he had no business to. If he had done more and said less while he lived he might have been rich. As it was I had to bury him," and Mr. Bland looked as if he believed he had been greatly imposed on. Tom Barker said nothing more for a while, but Bob judged from his face that he was thinking a whole lot. Dinner over, Mr. Bland retired at once to his room. Barker, however, pulled out a cigar and took his seat outside the kitchen door to smoke it. As for Bob, he washed up the dishes, tidied up the room and did a few other things that were necessary. By that time his disreputable cousin had finished his cigar.

"What are you going to do with yourself this afternoon?" he asked Bob.

"I haven't thought about the matter," replied the boy, who didn't feel like giving out any information to Tom Barker.

"You might take me over to town in your boat."

"I'll take you if you want to go. Coming back?"

"Sure, afore dark. What time do you have supper?"

"Round six."

"Can I get anybody to bring me over then?"

"If you're lucky."

"S'pose you come over after me at half-past five?"

"Couldn't do it. I'll be busy getting supper then."

"You might manage it somehow. It wouldn't take you ten minutes."

"If I knew you were there, and the wind was all right, I might fetch your over."

"I'll be there on the wharf at half-past five. Ready now to take me across?"

"Yes."

Bob went up and knocked on his uncle's door. The old man opened it.

"I may be away the rest of the afternoon, Uncle Hiram. Anything I can do for you before I start?"

"I don't want you to go away while Tom Barker is around the house," said his uncle, in a nervous tone, not usual with him.

"He won't be around. He's going across to town and intends to remain there till half-past five. He asked me to carry him over in the boat."

"Oh!" replied Mr. Bland, with a look of relief. "Lock up as usual, and you needn't come back till it's time to get supper."

"All right, sir; I was thinking of going down to the lake in the boat and taking a sail. There's a spanking breeze," said Bob.

As he turned from the door Bob could have sworn he saw the top of Tom Barker's head disappear down the stairs.

"That chap has been listening," he muttered. "I hate sneaks."

When he returned to the kitchen he found Barker where he had left him at the door, but that was no evidence that he hadn't crept upstairs to hear what passed between Bob and his uncle.

"Come along," said Bob, locking the kitchen door.

They had gone about a yard when it occurred to the boy that he hadn't tried the windows.

Then he remembered that he hadn't opened either one since his return. He thought he'd try them, anyway, so he started back.

"What are you going back for?" asked Barker.

"To try the windows."

"They're all right. You see they're shut," said his cousin.

Nevertheless Bob did not turn from his purpose. He tried the one to the left of the door and found it fast.

"I told you they were all right," said Barker. "Come on; I'm in a hurry."

Bob never did things by halves, and accordingly he went to the other window. A dark look came over Barker's face when he saw that the boy would do as he pleased. When Bob tried the window on the right he found, somewhat to his surprise, that it was unlatched. He wondered if he had left it that way when he went to town in the morning. He had to go in and lock it.

"I don't see that it makes much difference whether it's locked or not," said Barker, in a surly tone. "There don't seem to be anybody around here, and Mr. Bland is in the house and would hear any one that got in the house."

"His orders are to lock up when I go away, and I follow them," replied Bob.

Nothing more was said on the subject, and fifteen minutes later Bob put his cousin ashore on the wharf, then turning the boat's nose down the creek, he was soon out of sight of both Barker and the wharf.

CHAPTER III.—A Catastrophe.

It was only a short distance to the lake on which the town fronted, but the trend of the creek carried Bob away from the place. As soon as he entered the lake he began skirting the shore in the direction that would take him still further from the town. At this point the lake was lined with handsome residences, set in extensive grounds, where lived many of the well-to-do gentlemen whose business interests were identified with Cadiz. Every one of these places had a private wharf jutting out into the lake, and most

of them a floating stage in front of a small bathing pavilion. Where the town ended on the other side there were a dozen public bathing huts for the use of the general public, under a low buff that faced a strip of sandy beach. The lake itself was a pretty good-sized one, and had several islands, the larger of which was fitted up for the picnic parties that frequented it. At most of the private wharves Bob passed small sloop yachts were moored. As he passed the last of the shore residences and headed out into the lake, he saw some distance ahead a handsome little sloop yacht kiting along like a sea bird. Bob admired the craft, which had two aboard of her, one of whom was a girl.

He wished he owned a boat that could show her heels like that one.

"This old skate makes pretty good time for a sailboat, but that craft could sail in circles around me and then not half try," he said.

Bob somewhat exaggerated the speed of the fancy yacht, but nevertheless she could go some. She left Bob and his weather-stained boat far behind, and in the course of half an hour disappeared around one of the islands.

Bob ran over to the island and headed into a cove where he saw a catboat moored that he recognized. He found three boys standing around a fire they had built there. The boys were all acquaintances of his.

"Hello, Bob!" cried one named Phil Daly, when he saw the sailboat glide in.

"Hello, fellows!" replied Bob, dropping his sail.

He took the mooring rope in his hand and jumped ashore.

"What are you cooking—fish?" he asked, after tying the line to a tree.

"Look like it, doesn't it?" answered Will Stover.

"Been fishing then, eh?"

"Surest thing you know," said the third boy, Al Glenn by name.

"You're just in time for a feed," said Daly.

"I'm not hungry. Had my dinner about two hours ago," replied Bob.

"Well, you can find room for a fresh fish, I guess. Look at 'em browning in the pan. Make your mouth water, don't they?"

Bob had to admit that they did. In a few minutes the fish were done, and then Stover produced a box of crackers and three bottles of ginger pop. Bob sat down and joined in the feast.

"That old hooker of yours is a pretty smart sailer, Bob," said Glenn, "but I've got a quarter to bet that she can't beat my boat to the creek."

"I don't believe she can, either, in this wind," said Bob. "You carry more sail than I do, and ought to walk away from me."

"I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll give you 300 yards start, as near as I can guess it, and race you," said Glenn.

Bob looked out on the white caps and then said:

"If Stover will come with me as a little extra ballast I'll go you."

"I'm with you, Bob," said Will. "We'll make these chaps look sick."

"You only think you will," grinned Daly.

"We'll give you our wash before you're half way to the creek."

"Not as bad as that, I hope," laughed Bob.

"With 300 yards start I think I can give you chaps a run for your money."

"You ought to be able to do that," said Stover. "I wouldn't have offered to race you if I didn't think you could give me a tussle. There is no fun in running away from your rival."

"Say, I suppose you've heard about the new factory they've been putting up in town on Putnam street," said Daly. "It's been under way since spring, and is nearly ready for business. I've put in an application for a job there."

"What kind of a job?" asked Bob.

"I want to learn the business."

"What kind of business is it?"

"Making locks and hinges for elephants' trunks," laughed Stover.

"Say, you're too funny for anything, Will Stover," said Daly. "Why don't you join a circus as a boy clown?"

"If I had to earn my daily bread like you I might consider it," grinned Will.

"Cut it out," said Bob. "Tell me what they're going to make at the new factory, Phil."

"All kinds of wire work, from fences to fancy baskets to keep flowers in."

"That's isn't a bad trade."

"I should say not. It's a growing one these days."

"I should like to learn it myself."

"Why don't you?"

"Because my Uncle Hiram won't let me go to work."

"Does he expect to leave you a fortune when he dies?"

"I don't know what he expects to leave me, or whether he has anything to leave."

"He must have something, for neither of you earn anything."

"I know no more about his business than the man in the moon," said Bob.

"He isn't treating you fair. He ought to let you learn a trade so you'd know where you were at in case he turned up his toes and left you a few hundred dollars, which wouldn't amount to shucks," said Daly. "Ain't that right, fellows?"

"That's right," nodded Glenn. "I'd learn a trade in a minute if I had to, but my father, who is paying teller in the Cadiz Bank, has got me an opening there. I'm going to start in as soon as vacation is over."

"I wish you chaps luck," said Stover. "I'm going to college this fall, and after that I intend to study law."

"The woods are full of lawyers," said Daly. "However, I suppose your father will support you till you get a case or two. I've heard that lots of young lawyers can't pay their washerwoman."

"Good lawyers can always get on," said Will. "Some day I expect to go on the bench."

"What bench?" asked Daly.

"That's what they call it when a lawyer becomes a judge," explained Will.

"Oh, he sits on a bench, does he?"

"No, he doesn't. That's only the expression."

"Well, if you are ready, Bob, we'll start our race," said Glenn.

"I'm ready. Come on, Will."

Inside of five minutes the sailboat was gliding out of the cove. The catboat followed, but hove

too close to the beach, while the other craft headed for the end of the island, which point Glenn figured at about 300 yards. Just as the sailboat passed that line Bob caught sight of the handsome little sloop yacht he had followed as far as the island an hour before. She was coming out from behind the opposite side of the island at a rapid clip. Evidently she had been up to the other end of the lake.

"Isn't she a beauty. Will?" said Bob.

"Bet your life she is. Say, there's a girl aboard of her. I wonder if that's her father with her?"

"He knows how to sail a boat all right, whoever he is," said Bob.

"He needs to in this wind. If I didn't know you were an expert yourself I wouldn't have come along with you," said Will.

"Oh, you're safe enough. I've had this craft out in bigger blows than this. She's a regular cockle-shell—rides over the water and doesn't take a thimbleful in. Glenn isn't overhauling us so fast after all."

"He isn't doing any better. He's had to take a reef in his mainsail."

While they were talking the fancy yacht, sailing diagonally across their course, crept up quite close. They could see the girl very clearly now.

She was dressed in a neat sailor suit, with a straw hat from which floated a streamer, and was undoubtedly pretty.

"She's a peach, Bob," said Will, who had a weakness, like most boys, for the fair sex.

"That's what she—good gracious!"

The exclamation was drawn from Bob by a sudden accident which overtook the yacht. The end of the boom to which the sheet was attached snapped short off, the force of the wind ripped the mainsail right up to the gaff, the released boom followed the wind, while the gaff was held by the torn strip of canvas with the end of the boom at the bottom, by the sheet. This caused the yacht to lurch to the windward, as the wind was spilled out of the sail.

As a consequence, the girl who was sitting high up on the windward side of the cockpit, with only a low rail behind her, pitched backward, head over heels into the lake, and disappeared beneath the surface.

CHAPTER IV.—Bob to the Rescue.

The catastrophe came so sudden that the two boys were dazed by it. As they gazed over the waters they saw the girl's straw hat with its streamer bobbing up and down on the choppy seas, and the girl herself was out of sight. The yacht had already been carried some distance away from the spot where the accident happened, but the sailboat was close to it.

"There she is," cried Will, pointing.

Bob looked and saw the girl's head appear above the surface. He headed the boat for her, but just as he reached out to seize her by the hair, a wave whisked her out of his reach. He brought the boat around on the opposite tack and headed back. But the girl sank just as the sailboat came dashing up.

"Grab the tiller, Will, and throw her up into the wind," cried Bob, kicking off his shoes.

The next moment he dived overboard and shot below the surface.

By the greatest good luck he made out the girl still going down. He succeeded in seizing her by the hair, then he brought her to the surface. She was still conscious, and struggled desperately to get hold of him. He dexterously avoided her grasp, and got hold of her from behind.

"Be quiet, miss, and I'll save you," he said.

She was too frantic to heed his words if she heard them, and he was obliged to handle her with the greatest caution, while he endeavored to swim with one arm toward the sailboat lying to a very few yards away. The boys on the pursuing catboat, seeing that something was wrong, headed for the spot, and came up just as Bob grabbed the gunwale of the sailboat, and hung on with one arm, while the other was thrown about the now exhausted girl.

Will reached over and grabbed hold of one of the girl's arm, but as he was obliged to hold on to the tiller and keep it to port, he could not do anything toward getting her on board.

"Can you hold on to her?" asked Bob.

"Yes," replied Will.

"I'm afraid to chance it," returned Bob. "Let go and hand me that loose line, then grab her again."

Will did so. Bob then released his arm from the girl and put the line around under her arms, and after much trouble, owing to the heaving of the water and the boat, succeeded in making a hitch that would hold.

"If she gets away from you the line will prevent her from sinking far," he said.

Then he scrambled into the boat and relieved his companion of his responsibility, dragging the half senseless girl into the boat.

"Say, Glenn," he shouted across to the catboat, which had also come to, "run down to the yacht and tell the gentleman that the young lady has been saved. See if you can be of any service to him."

Glenn nodded, and the catboat was off like a shot. Bob turned the girl's face downward, with her head lower than her body, to permit any water she might have swallowed to escape out of her mouth. That was all he could do, so he seized the tiller from Will and headed for the yacht, which was wallowing about in the trough of the seas, as the gentleman, in his anxiety about his daughter, made no effort to get the broken boom aboard, which he could have done by bringing the yacht up in the wind with the aid of the rudder.

As soon as Al Glenn reported to him that his daughter had been rescued, he turned his attention to the yacht, and presently had the boom where he could hitch the sheet around the fractured end of it. While he was thus employed, the sailboat came up, ran under his lee, and closed in. Will using a boat-hook to prevent a collision. Bob's object was to get the girl aboard the yacht. The gentleman had fastened his tiller with a short hitch, which held her steady, owing to her weather helm.

"My daughter!" cried the gentleman, gazing at his motionless child. "Don't tell me she is drowned!"

"No, she's only unconscious, sir," replied Bob. "Do you think you can take her aboard?"

"Yes, yes; she must come aboard by all means," he replied.

"All right," said Bob.

He dropped his mainsail and allowed the sailboat to glide to the stern of the yacht. Then he tossed the painter to the gentleman.

"Make her fast," he said.

This was done. Bob picked the girl up in his arms and carried her forward into the bows. Watching his chance when his boat rose and the other sank, he sprang into the yacht's cockpit.

The girl opened her eyes and murmured, "Father!" as the gentleman took her in his arms and kissed her.

"Will," said Bob, "make the sail fast to the boom any old way so it won't get lose. I'm going to stay aboard here and you can come, too. We'll take my boat in tow."

The gentleman took his daughter into the little cabin and shut the door. Bob added another hitch to the one the gentleman had made around the broken boom, and as soon as Will joined him he put the yacht on a course that would take her to the shore. The catboat also filed away on the same tack. The yacht was close in shore when the gentleman came out of the cabin.

"Young man," he said, going up to Bob and seizing his disengaged hand, "you have saved my daughter's life, and I am very grateful to you."

"Oh, that's nothing, sir. I always pick up anything I find adrift," replied Bob, with a smile.

"You have been in the water. In fact, I saw you dive after her. Do you call that nothing in such a sea as is on this afternoon? She would have been lost but for you, and I don't know how to adequately express the sentiments I feel toward you. You have placed me under an obligation I never can repay in full, but, believe me, I will reward you handsomely for it," said the gentleman.

"I don't charge anything for what I've done. I should expect to be picked up myself if I'd gone overboard, as the young lady did, when there were two boats near at hand to give assistance, and I'm always willing to do as much for any one," said Bob.

"Nevertheless, young man, I shall show my gratitude to you in some substantial way," insisted the gentleman.

"It isn't necessary, sir," protected the boy.

"What is your name, my lad?"

"Bob Howard."

"You live in Cadiz, of course."

"No, sir. I live just across the creek from the town."

"My name is Willcutt—Joseph Willcutt. I live in that new house yonder. Please head for the wharf."

Bob altered the yacht's course enough to comply with the gentleman's request. The new house to which the gentleman pointed was certainly a very handsome specimen of modern cottage construction. It stood on rising ground, in the midst of an extensive ground that would in time become a fine green lawn, dotted by many shade trees. On either side, at a proper distance, were outhouses, devoted to various purposes, while the property on three sides was surrounded by an iron fence. In a few minutes Bob ran the yacht alongside of the wharf and made her fast.

"Howard," said Mr. Willcutt, "you must be very uncomfortable in your wet clothes. You must come with me to the house, where I'll fit you out in some of mine till yours are dried and pressed in the laundry."

Bob had no objection to accepting the gentleman's offer, as he was uncomfortable, notwithstanding the warmth of the day, for the wind was high, and he had no facilities at his uncle's cottage for drying his garments quickly.

"All right, Mr. Willcutt, much obliged to you," he said. Then turning to his companion, he added: "Signal the catboat to come in here, Will, and go home in her. No use of you waiting for me, for it may be some time before I'm ready to go home."

Accordingly the catboat was signaled, and in a few minutes Bob said good-by to his three friends. Before starting for the house the gentleman entered the cabin and spoke to his daughter, who had turned into one of the bunks. She declared that she had suffered no bad effects from her involuntary bath, and was feeling quite comfortable. Then she asked about the boy, to whom she felt that she owed her life.

"His name is Bob Howard, and you will have an opportunity to thank him before he goes home," said her father. "I will send your mother's maid down with dry clothes for you."

Leaving the cabin, he and Bob proceeded to the house. Mr. Willcutt took the boy to his own apartment and told him to strip. The gardener was called and told to give Bob a good rub down, after which he was provided with dry undergarments and one of the gentleman's suits.

His wet clothes were sent to the laundry to be fixed up. The gentleman handed Bob a magazine and told him to amuse himself with it till he returned.

Bob didn't see him for nearly half an hour.

"Now, my lad," said Mr. Willcutt, "I want to know what I can do for you. I owe you more than I can ever pay."

"I don't know that you can do anything for me, sir," replied Bob. "I only did what I considered the right thing in saving your daughter."

"You might have lost your own life in the attempt."

"I don't think so. I am a good swimmer, and my friends were close at hand to help me if I needed aid."

"Still you saved my daughter's life, and I must repay you in some way."

Mr. Willcutt then drew from Bob the life he was leading with his uncle.

"I think your uncle is acting wrong toward you. He ought to hire a servant and let you engage in some occupation that suits you, and on which you can build your future," said the gentleman.

"Yes, sir; I wish he would. I'd like to learn some trade," said Bob.

"What trade would you like to learn?"

"I haven't given the subject much consideration, but I think I'd like to go into that new wire goods manufactory that is about to start up in the village."

"Indeed," replied the gentleman, with a pleased look. "Nothing could be easier if you can arrange matters with your uncle."

"Why, would you get me an opening there?"

"That would be very simple for me, as I own the factory."

"Do you really?" cried Bob, opening his eyes.

"Yes, I am moving my establishment here from Warren, in the interior of the State. I expect to start operations in my new building in about three or four weeks. I should be very glad to give you a chance to learn the business, and then advance you as fast as your ability permitted me to do. I think it would be an exceptional opportunity for you. You would have the advantage of my friendship, and in time you might rise to become superintendent of the business."

"I should like the chance very much indeed," said Bob, eagerly. "I'll speak to my uncle this evening. I wouldn't like to miss such an opportunity. It is time that I got down to real work. I am really only wasting my time as things are. My uncle is certainly old enough to see that it would be to my interest to take up with your offer."

"Well, Howard, in any event you can count on me as your staunch friend from this hour; and I shall do all I can to help you ahead in the world."

"I am very much obliged to you, sir."

"Not at all. The obligation is all on my side."

As soon as Bob's clothes were in shape for him to put on they were brought to him, and then he felt like himself once more.

He was taken into the sitting-room where he found Bessie Willcutt and her mother waiting to see him and thank him for his gallant conduct.

"You saved me from drowning, Mr. Howard, and I shall remember you as long as I live," said the girl, warmly.

"We shall never forget what you have done for us," put in Mrs. Willcutt, with much feeling in her tones.

Bob felt much embarrassed in the presence of the charming girl who owed her life to him, and hardly knew how to find suitable words to express himself.

He finally managed to say that he felt amply repaid in having saved her, and then added that it wasn't every fellow who got the chance to pick up such a nice girl in the water.

Then he blushed and looked confused when he realized what he had said, while Bessie laughed and blushed a little, too.

CHAPTER V.—Death.

It was half-past six o'clock when Bob finally took his leave of the Willcutt family and walked down to the private wharf to put off in his sailboat for the creek.

They had tried to prevail on him to remain to tea, but he excused himself on the ground that his uncle depended on him for his own supper, and besides, there was a visitor at the cottage, too.

"I won't get back before seven," thought Bob, as he cast off the boat's painter and hoisted the sail. "Tom Barker will be as mad as a hornet, I'll bet, because I was not on hand to bring him over from town, but I guess he's managed to get over long before this, and got my uncle to

let him in the front way. Uncle Hiram won't make any kick over the length of my absence when I have explained the circumstances, so I don't care if Barker is grouchy. He hasn't any right to find fault with what I do.

Half an hour later Bob was tying the boat to her moorings.

He could see across to the town landing, but no one was there.

He hurried to the cottage and shoved the key into the lock of the kitchen door, but it met with an obstruction.

Bob was astonished that there should be anything the matter with the lock, and after trying the key again unsuccessfully, he put his eyes to the hole.

Ordinarily he could have caught a glimpse of the interior of the kitchen, but now he saw nothing.

The hole was clearly stuffed up.

It was not that way when he left, and he wondered if one of his acquaintances, finding him away, had played that prank on him.

He got out his pocket knife and started to prod the obstruction.

It didn't look as if it had been inserted from the outside, unless the person who did it had pushed the stuff back in the hole.

Finally, after some effort, Bob succeeded in shoving the obstruction out of the keyhole.

Then he inserted the key and had no trouble in getting in.

He picked up the filler and found it was a wad of paper that had been put in damp and dried there, which showed that it had been in the keyhole some time.

"I don't see anything funny about that," he said. "I wish I knew who was responsible for it, I'd give him a calling down."

He left the door open, shook up the fire, turned on the draugh, placed a kettle of water on to boil, and then he decided to go up and explain things to his uncle.

He wasn't sure but Tom Barker had got back; in fact, he believed he had, and was with Mr. Bland in his room, so when he opened the door into the hall he stood and listened before proceeding upstairs.

He didn't hear a sound.

The house was as silent as a churchyard.

This, however, was nothing unusual.

Mr. Bland never made any noise in his room, and as far as he was concerned the cottage would have seemed untenanted.

Bob started upstairs, and when he came to his uncle's door he listened again.

He heard no sounds of conversation, or any movement within, which induced him to believe that Tom Barker was not on the premises after all.

He was glad of it, for he did not look upon his cousin as a desirable visitor.

So he knocked on the door in his usual way.

He was not told to come in, and waited in vain for Mr. Bland to answer him.

"He must have fallen asleep in his chair," thought the boy.

Under that impression he knocked louder, but still there was no answer. Trying the handle of the door, he ventured to open it. Looking in he

saw his uncle seated in his chair before his desk, his body bent forward and his face buried in his arms, as if he was in a profound slumber.

"I guess I won't bother him now till I have prepared supper," thought Bob.

So he returned to the kitchen and went on with his work. It was now growing dark, and he lighted the lamp. The meal was about ready when he heard steps outside, and a moment later Tom Barker appeared at the door.

"You're a nice chap," he said. "I was on the wharf promptly at half-past five and waited there till six, but you never showed up."

"I know it. Circumstances over which I had no control prevented me."

"I s'pose so," growled his cousin. "I started to walk around by the road, but fortunately I met a wagon that gave me a lift a good part of the way."

"Then I guess you didn't suffer much through me not meeting you," said Bob.

"It was a matter of luck that I didn't. You're late in getting supper."

"Because I didn't get home until after seven."

"You're a fine housekeeper, you are," sneered Barker, bringing out a cigar and proceeding to light it.

"Supper is ready," said Bob.

"I don't want any. Had mine in town," replied Barker, puffing away.

Bob said nothing, but picking up the bell went into the hall and rang it extra loud to awaken his uncle.

"Where did you go this afternoon?" asked Barker when he came back.

"Sailing on the lake."

"You ought to be better employed than that."

"I wish I was."

"Oh, you do? Perhaps you will be before long."

Bob looked at his cousin, for the man's tone seemed significant; but Barker was looking carelessly out into the starlight evening.

"What makes you think I will?" asked the boy.

"Eh?" exclaimed Barker, turning his head.

"I asked you why you think I will be employed at something else before long."

"I didn't say you would."

"You said perhaps I would."

"What if I did? Most anything is likely to happen to a chap. Things have happened to me that I never expected."

That was quite true. Several things had happened to Barker that he neither looked for nor desired, but he wasn't saying what they were.

"I wish Mr. Bland would come to his supper," said Bob.

"Maybe he's busy," suggested Barker.

"I never knew him to be too busy to come to the table."

"Why don't you go up and call him?"

"He knows what the sound of the bell means."

Bob got the bell and rang it again, more vigorously than before. Still his uncle didn't come.

"Mighty funny. I guess I'll have to go up and see why he doesn't come."

Barker said nothing, but he shifted his legs.

"Here, why are you taking that lamp?" he said.

Bob was taking it because something impressed him with the idea that he would find no lamp lighted in his uncle's room. Ordinarily he wouldn't

have thought of taking the lamp, and in point of fact he took it up without any actual volition on his own part.

"I thought maybe my uncle hadn't lighted up yet—that he may be asleep," replied Bob.

"Take some matches and leave the lamp. You know your way, and I don't want to stay here in the dark," said Barker, in an uneasy tone, that was not at all characteristic of him.

"Why, it's bright enough out of doors," returned Bob.

"I don't care if it is. I want the lamp, do you hear?"

"Oh, all right," responded Bob, putting the lamp back on the table.

He took a couple of matches and went up to his uncle's room. Opening the door, he found the room dark. He struck a match and saw the form of Mr. Bland in the same position he had observed it before. He thought it strange that his uncle slept so sound that he failed to hear the bell. He crossed over and lighted the lamp that stood on the top of the desk. The room seemed preternaturally still. He could not even hear his uncle breathe, and a person usually breathes heavier when asleep, especially if in an unusual attitude than at other times. As Bob looked at the motionless man he began to experience a strange feeling of uneasiness. Was there anything wrong with Mr. Bland?

"Uncle Hiram, wake up—supper is ready," he said, shaking him by the arm.

His uncle never made a move of his own accord.

"Goodness! there is surely something wrong with him," breathed the boy, anxiously. "Uncle Hiram! Wake up!"

Mr. Bland's head fell over a little and revealed to the excited boy a ghastly white face on which lay the stamp of death.

"Great Scott! He's dead!" gasped Bob.

As he spoke, a strange, heavy, sweet-smelling aroma reached his nostrils. It seemed to come from a handkerchief that lay under the dead man's face.

"Dead! My uncle dead!" murmured Bob, his eyes filling with tears, for he had a strong regard for the only living relative he believed he had till the unexpected arrival of Tom Barker that day. "How came he to die? He seemed strong and healthy as usual when I spoke to him last a few hours ago. Poor, dear uncle! I did not dream that you would die so soon. This is terrible. I must tell Barker, though I don't suppose he'll care a whole lot. He isn't the kind that cares for anybody or anything but himself."

Leaving things as they were, Bob walked slowly downstairs.

"What kept you so long?" growled Barker, looking at the boy curiously as he re-entered the kitchen. "What's the matter with you? What are you crying about?"

"Uncle Hiram is dead," replied Bob, seating himself and putting his handkerchief to his face.

"What in thunder are you giving me? Why he was all right at dinner."

"Yes, he was, but he's dead now."

"I don't believe it," snarled Barker, the remnant of his cigar fluttering in his shaking fingers.

"Go upstairs to his room and you will see that it is the truth."

Barker, however, showed no eagerness to go up and find out for himself. Had Bob taken notice of his face at that moment he would have seen that it was almost as white and ghastly as the dead man's. Barker fumbled at his hip pocket and pulled out a pocket flask labeled whiskey. His fingers shook as he unscrewed the metal cap, and he spilled some of the liquor as he put the bottle to his lips. He took a long drink, then looked nervously around the room, particularly at the door leading into the hall, and sighed. It was strange that a man of Barker's temperament should shiver after taking a big drink of whiskey when the air that came in at the door was warm and balmy. Nevertheless he did, but with a smothered imprecation he pulled himself together as if angry at himself.

"Sure he's dead, are you?" he said, at length.

"Yes," replied Bob, getting up and pacing up and down.

"What caused him to die?"

"I couldn't tell you. I must go for a doctor. Maybe——"

"Maybe what?" asked Barker sharply.

"No, he's dead. His face is so ghastly that he is surely dead. He cannot be brought back to life," said Bob, who had momentarily entertained the wild idea that a doctor might be able to revive his uncle.

"It's funny he should die so sudden," said Barker.

"It is, indeed. Very strange. I'll have to get a doctor anyway," and he took up his hat.

"Tell me where I'll find one and I'll go," said Barker, showing remarkable willingness to make himself useful, which would have surprised any one who knew him well.

"You're a stranger around here, and I couldn't direct you. I won't be gone long."

"Then you'd better lock up."

"Why so? You're here."

"Well, I'm not going to stay here alone just the same," replied Barker, in a tone that showed he meant what he said.

"Where will you go?"

"Are you going to town?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll go across with you."

"Some one ought to remain with my dead uncle."

"If he's dead he doesn't need anybody."

He walked out into the night and Bob followed him. Fifteen minutes afterward they were on the wharf, walking up into the town. Barker stopped at the first saloon they came to and said he'd wait there till Bob came back, so the boy walked on to Dr. Black's house. On his arrival he told his sad story to the physician, whom he knew well. Dr. Black said he'd go back with him, but from what he gleaned from the boy's story he said he guessed it was a case for the coroner. Bob looked in at the saloon, but saw no sign of Barker. He asked a man if he knew where he was, and the reply he received was that the person

CHAPTER VI.—Suicide or Murder—Which?

"What's that?" roared Tom Barker, in unsteady tones. "You say he's dead?"

"Yes," answered Bob, tremulously.

answering to Barker's description had gone off some time before. Barker wasn't waiting at the wharf, so Bob crossed without him. Reaching the cottage, he took the doctor to his uncle's room. The physician sniffed suspiciously as he walked in. There was an odor in the air he didn't like. He walked over to the dead man and raised his head.

"He's dead, and has been so for hours," he said.

Then he picked up the handkerchief and sniffed it at a distance. He immediately replaced it and looked very serious.

"Is this the way you found your uncle?" asked Dr. Black.

"Yes, doctor."

"Have you no suspicion for the cause of his death?"

"Not the slightest. Was it heart failure?"

"No. This is either a case of suicide or——"

The doctor paused.

"Suicide!" gasped Bob. "No, no; Uncle Hiram wouldn't kill himself."

"Old men sometimes do when life becomes burdensome to them, or for some other cause. You haven't heard him complain about not feeling well, have you?"

"No; he was always in good health."

"You were away all the afternoon, I think you said?"

"I was."

"The cottage was locked up, I suppose, during your absence?"

"Yes, doctor."

"If any one had been here you'd have seen some evidence of it, wouldn't you?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"Because," said the physician, slowly, "if Mr. Bland did not commit suicide, he has been murdered."

"Murdered!" cried Bob. "Impossible! I found the place just as I left it. No, there was one curious thing."

"What was it?" asked the doctor, with an air of interest.

"I couldn't get the key into the lock of the kitchen door. When I examined it I found that some one had stuffed a piece of wet paper into it. I supposed it was practical joke on the part of one of my friends to make me mad."

"It is odd such a trick should be played on you at a time when your uncle lay dead in his room. I may be mistaken in my idea, but I think this is a case for the police. The coroner will determine when he views the body and hears your story. I suppose you will remain here?"

"Yes."

"I will notify the coroner and advise him to drive around right away. If your uncle has met his death at the hands of some other than himself, the fact can't be established too soon."

"I don't see how he could have been murdered," said Bob. "If he was, the object would have been plunder. I see no signs that anything has been disturbed."

"Do you know where your uncle kept his money and valuables?"

"No, I do not."

"Then you cannot tell whether they have been stolen or not."

"But a stranger could not have got into the

house without forcing a door or a window, and I see no evidence that such a thing has happened."

"Have you thoroughly looked over the house?"

"No, I admit I haven't; but still——"

"We will take the lamp downstairs and have a look," said Dr. Black.

They went downstairs and got the lamp. They began with the kitchen windows. They were found just as Bob had left them. The sitting-room windows had not been touched. The front door was locked and bolted.

"What's this room?" asked the doctor as Bob tried the door of the empty room and found it locked, as he expected.

"It's a vacant and unfurnished room."

"There's a Yale lock on the door, I see. Why is it thus provided if the room is merely an empty one?"

"I couldn't tell you. That lock was there when I came to the house, three years ago. To my knowledge the door has never been opened."

"Well, there seems to be no sign that any one has surreptitiously entered the cottage on the ground floor. Now how about the floor above?"

"It would require a ladder to reach any of the windows, and we have none."

"Then I give the matter up. The coroner will have to decide whether this is a suicide or a murder. I have an idea he will learn in favor of the former. By the way, you said you had a visitor here to-day. Who was he?"

"His name is Tom Barker. He is a cousin of mine and the son of my uncle, Otis Barker, who died some years ago."

"How old is he, and what kind of a chap?"

"About thirty-five, I believe, and to tell the truth, I don't fancy him much."

"Do you know much about him?"

"I never saw him till to-day."

"But you have heard of him?"

"Yes."

"What was his reputation in the family?"

"Not very good."

"I presume you are not acquainted with the object of his visit?"

"No, but judging from his appearance, I suspected he called to ask Mr. Bland for some pecuniary assistance."

"Where is he now?"

"I haven't any idea. When I went away this afternoon I took him across the creek, and was to meet him at the wharf at half-past five to bring him back. I was not on hand, and so he had to come back here by the road. He was here when I discovered that my uncle was dead. I wanted him to remain in charge of the cottage while I went for you, but he wouldn't. He went across with me and left me at the saloon, where I stopped to speak to the man at the door. I haven't seen him since."

Bob took the doctor across to the wharf, walked with him as far as the saloon to see if Barker was waiting for him there, and finding that he was not, he went back to the cottage to await the coming of the coroner.

CHAPTER VII.—The Snake Ring.

The coroner arrived an hour later and brought with him a policeman in plain clothes. This was due to a hint conveyed by Dr. Black that he sus-

pected it might be a case of foul play. While waiting for the official, Bob warmed up his supper and ate it, though he did not feel very hungry, owing to the somewhat depressed state of his spirits, brought about by his uncle's unexpected death. He piloted the coroner, whose name was Dr. Hague, and his companion to the room where the dead man still sat bent over his desk. After verifying the facts imparted to him by Dr. Black, the coroner and the policeman straightened the corpse out on the floor, and the former told Bob that he could send for an undertaker to prepare his late uncle for burial. Then he proceeded to question the boy closely, and Bob repeated all the facts he had told Dr. Black.

Finally the coroner said that he was not sure whether he would hold an inquest or not. He went away, leaving the policeman in charge. That officer, acting on instructions, proceeded to make an investigation with the view of satisfying himself as to the cause of Mr. Bland's death. Both he and the coroner were of the opinion that the old man had committed suicide, but the matter was open to doubt. Bob and the policeman hunted through the dead man's effects for his money, but they found none. They discovered his cash box, but there wasn't anything in it.

"Of course he must have had money," said the policeman, "otherwise you two couldn't have lived here without any source of income."

"That's true," replied Bob. "I wanted to go to work, instead of keeping house for him, but he wouldn't listen to it. Whenever I brought the subject up he told me there was no need for it. Once he intimated that if anything happened to him I would find myself well provided for."

"He told you that, eh? Then he must have had money or valuables about."

A close search of the room, however, failed to reveal any sign of the dead man's presumed resources. The old man's trunk looked very untidy. His things were thrown into it in a helter skelter fashion.

"Looks like as if some one had been rummaging through it," said the policeman. "Was he careless in his habits?"

"I never thought so," replied Bob. "He always kept himself very neat, and attended to his room himself. I considered him a very orderly man."

The condition of his trunk doesn't bear out that idea, neither does the appearance of his desk, where his papers appear to be all mixed up. But for the lack of evidence that a thief had broken into the house during your absence I should be inclined to suspect that somebody has been going through his effects. If that were the case, the intruder might have drugged your uncle beforehand, not necessarily intending to kill him."

"It doesn't seem natural for my uncle to have committed suicide," said Bob. "I never saw him in poor spirits. But if he was drugged to death, as seems to be the fact, and robbed of his money, we ought to find something that would show it. I don't see how a stranger could have got into this house, and afterwards departed, without leaving some sign of his visit behind him. You saw that the front door was locked and bolted. That all the windows were secure. That's the way they were when I got back, and the kitchen door was locked, too, just as I left it. The only suspicious circumstance at all was the fact that the keyhole

was stuffed up with paper. Had a thief picked that lock and got in, there would have been no sense in his stopping up the lock if he expected to go out that way."

"What other rooms are there on this floor besides this?" asked the policeman.

"Two, one of which is mine."

"I will look at them," he said.

They entered the spare room first. It was furnished with a carpet, a bed, a washstand, and a few other things. The window was closed and latched. Clearly no one had entered the house that way. They then passed into Bob's room.

"Have you been here since you returned to the house prior to finding your uncle dead?" asked the officer.

"No," answered Bob.

"The window is open, you see. Did you leave it that way?"

"I always leave my window open at both top and bottom, but I'll admit that the lower sash is open much more than I thought I left it."

"Are you sure that you did not leave it that way?"

"No, I am not sure, but it isn't my habit to do so."

"A man could have got in and out at that window easily enough."

"Not without a ladder, and we have none."

The policeman looked out. There was a stout oak tree standing a short distance away. He noticed that one of the limbs extended over to the peaked roof.

In his opinion an active person could easily have made his way up the tree to the crotch, seized the branch in question, which looked strong enough to sustain an ordinary man's weight, worked his way hand over hand along it to the house, put his feet on the upper sash of the window, pushed it down, the lower one following, and by grasping the eaves, have secured a lodgment by straddling the sashes. It would then be a simple matter to get into the room. In getting out again, if the intruder wished to cover his tracks, he could have pushed the upper sash into its original position, the lower one just high enough to permit his body to pass through, lowered himself down as far as his reach permitted, and then dropped to the ground. He mentioned the *modus operandi* to Bob.

"That's so," admitted the boy. "I could do that myself. Maybe some one did get into the house that way. If some rascal did he wouldn't have gone to the kitchen and taken the trouble to stuff up the keyhole."

"He might if he was somebody who knew of your connection with the premises."

"What could that have to do with the matter?"

"A good deal. If he knew you were accustomed to let yourself in by the kitchen door he would take care to prevent you from coming on him unawares, by putting the keyhole out of business."

Bob hadn't thought of that idea, and it rather staggered him.

"Then it looks as if somebody did sneak into the cottage, surprised my uncle at his desk, drugged him, and got away with his money," he said.

"I'm beginning to entertain that opinion, though it is merely an assumption. That would hardly go with the chief. If we could find even

a slight clue as a foundation to begin with it would be something."

As Bob pushed the window down he saw some scratches on the ledge. He had the lamp down and pointed them out to the policeman.

"They might have been made by a man's finger nails," said the boy.

"Yes," admitted the officer, examining the marks closely.

At that moment Bob saw something bright on the floor. He flashed the light on it, then stooped and picked it up. It was a man's finger ring—a coiled snake with a ruby imbedded in its head. Not only that, but he remembered having seen a ring just like it on Tom Barker's middle finger.

"What's that?" asked the policeman. "A ring! Is it yours?"

"No, it isn't mine. I just picked it up under this window. It's the clue you wanted. It's positive evidence that somebody was in this room while I was away from here this afternoon."

"Ah!" said the officer. "We have got hold of something tangible at last. The owner of this ring will have to be found."

"I saw a duplicate of that ring on my cousin Tom Barker's finger today," said Bob.

"You did!" exclaimed the policeman, with a look of interest. "I believe he left the house with you this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"You left him at the wharf on the other side of the creek, I think you said?"

"Yes."

"About what time was that?"

"A little after two."

"And you did not return to the cottage till seven?"

"No, sir."

"At what hour did he come back?"

"About a quarter of eight."

"Did you notice the ring on his finger then?"

"I did not. I did not think about it."

"You haven't seen him since you left him at the saloon on your way to Dr. Black's house?"

"No."

"Didn't he intend to sleep here to-night?"

"I believe he did, but my uncle's death may have caused him to change his mind."

"That is rather an odd ring, and it would be a strange coincidence if two persons, each possessing such a ring, were both in this neighborhood today. You have stated before the corner and myself that this Barker looked to be in hard luck. You intimated your belief that the purpose of his visit was to borrow money of your uncle. Do you think Mr. Bland would have accommodated him?"

"I doubt it, as my uncle was a very close man, and I know he never regarded Tom Barker in a very favorable light."

"So. I think Barker's movements this afternoon will stand investigation. We will lock up the house and go to the police station. In my opinion it is advisable that the chief should be made acquainted with the facts."

Accordingly, Bob and the policeman started for Cadiz.

CHAPTER VIII.—Bob Calls at the Willcutt Home.

Hiram Bland's death was duly noted in the Cadiz newspapers, but without any hint as to foul play. Nor was it intimated that he had committed suicide. On the suspicion that the dead man's nephew, Tom Barker, who had failed to turn up at the cottage again, knew something about Hiram Bland's untimely taking off, a detective had been detailed to look him up. Mr. Bland was duly buried, and as no will had been found, the cottage was taken possession of by the Cadiz official, whose business it was to administer on the estates of people who died intestate. The cottage was undoubtedly the property of the deceased, and his only known heirs being Bob and Tom Barker, it would have to be eventually sold, together with its contents, and what was realized therefrom, after all fees and expenses had been paid, would be divided among his two nephews. As the property was not very valuable they were not likely to get much out of the estate. It would take some time to put the matter through the court, so the public administrator advertised the cottage for rent. He told Bob he could stay there until he found a tenant.

"I'm thrown on my own resources at last," thought Bob, after he had shown the official through the house, and that individual had taken his departure, after advancing the boy \$10 to cover his immediate expenses. "I would be in rather a tight fix but for the fact of having Mr. Willcutt's friendship and thus secured myself an opening in his new factory. I will now be able to learn a trade and get ahead in the world, and that will suit me to a T. I guess I can't do better than call on Mr. Willcutt and tell him that I am in a position to accept his offer. He has doubtless read of my uncle's sudden death in the papers, and will be expecting to hear from me right away."

Accordingly, Bob walked down to the creek to make the trip to Mr. Willcutt's home in his sailboat. His first idea was to go to the factory, but as that was not yet completed, he judged that he was more likely to find the factory owner at his home than in town. He had another reason, too, for giving Mr. Willcutt's home the preference, and that was it would probably afford him an opportunity of meeting the fair Miss Bessie again. The wind was light as he passed down the creek.

"I would give something to know where Tom Barker has taken himself off to," he mused. "His disappearance is decidedly suspicious, taken in connection with my uncle's mysterious death, and the discovery of the snake ring in my room. Can it be that Barker came back to the cottage while I was away, entered through my room window by means of the tree, surprised and drugged my uncle with the intention of robbing him, and then made off with whatever plunder he found? His conduct was rather strange that evening when he came back. Then that remark he made to me that perhaps I might be better employed before long seems significant in the light of what has happened. It would seem as if he knew that a change was about to take place in my circumstances. Did he know at that

moment that my uncle was dead? If he did, then he must have been responsible for the tragedy. If he had no hand in it why hasn't he returned to the house, since he has as much right there now as I have? I'm afraid to say what I think. Barker's reputation is against him, though I never heard that he was guilty of any criminal act. If he really killed Uncle Hiram I am sure he did it unintentionally. However, he must have got away with my uncle's money in that case. Time will probably tell whether he's guilty or not."

When Bob disembarked at the private wharf on the Willcutt property, he saw the natty yacht moored there. A couple of men were busy aboard of her putting in a new boom and substituting a new sail for the wrecked one. He walked up to the house and saw Miss Bessie sitting on the veranda fronting on the lake. As soon as she recognized him she dropped the magazine she was looking at and hastened to meet him.

"This is a pleasant surprise, Mr. Howard," she said, offering him her hand.

"I'm glad to see you again, Miss Willcutt. Is your father at home?" asked Bob.

"No, he hasn't returned from town, where he went directly after dinner. You wish to see him, I suppose?"

"Yes. I called to tell him that I am ready to go to work in his factory whenever he is ready to take me on. I suppose you have heard about my uncle's sudden death?"

"Father told us. There was an account in the paper. I sympathize with you in your loss. It is very sad when a member of one's family is taken away, particularly so unexpectedly. He was your only living relative, I believe?"

"The only one except a cousin, whom I have seen but twice."

"I presume you will get his property? Did he leave a will?"

"No will was found, so whatever is left after the estate has passed through the probate court and the hands of the public administrator, will be divided between my cousin and myself."

Bessie showed Bob over the grounds and then took him into the house to see her mother. Mrs. Willcutt welcomed him cordially and insisted that he remain to tea. In the course of an hour Mr. Willcutt arrived home and appeared pleased to find Bob there. He took him into his library.

"I called to tell you that I shall be glad to accept your offer to go to work in your factory and learn the trade of wire goods manufacture," said Bob.

"I am glad to hear it," said the factory owner. "I have been looking for a visit from you since I read about your uncle's unexpected death. What was the cause of it?"

"It was due to a drug accidentally administered in an overdose," replied Bob.

"Indeed, that was too bad. You are his heir, of course?"

"He had another nephew who stands on the same footing with myself."

"Then he did not make a will leaving all his property to you?"

"No will has been found by the public administrator, who has taken charge of the cottage."

"Did he leave any money to speak of?"

"We found no money among his effects."

"None at all?" exclaimed Mr. Willcutt, in a tone of surprise. "But he had a bank account?"

"If he did, his bankbook is missing."

"That's very strange. You two could not have lived without some means of support. As he wouldn't let you work, he must have had some kind of an income. He must have had his money invested and got dividends from it. Or it is quite possible he received a pension from the Government, or——"

"I don't think so. He never received any letters, and never went to town."

"Then he surely kept money in the house. How else could you pay your expenses?"

"He always seemed to have money, I'll admit. Whenever I needed any, all I had to do was to ask him for it, and I got what was necessary."

"And yet after his death you found none among his effects?"

"Not a single dollar. Not even a penny."

"Didn't the fact astonish you?"

"Somewhat."

"You told me that he gave you to understand that it wasn't necessary for you to go to work. That in case of his death you would find yourself well provided for."

"Yes, sir; he told me that more than once."

"What kind of man was he? Did he stay in the house all the time?"

"Yes, sir."

"Made no friends? Kept to himself? A sort of recluse?"

"Yes, sir."

"I suppose he never gave you any idea what he was worth?"

"No, sir."

"Well, it's my opinion he had money, and that he hid it somewhere about the house. Maybe under the floor, or in some secret place in the wall. Or perhaps he had a secret drawer in his bureau or desk where he kept it. I advise you to make a close search of every bit of furniture in his room. Also sound every foot of the floor, and examine the wall well."

"I never thought of doing that sir, and I will follow your advice. I must lose no time, as the administrator has advertised the house for rent."

"Does he intend to turn you out of the place?"

"He told me that the cottage will fetch so little at public auction that he must try and make it pan out as a producer while it is in his hands."

"How much rent does he expect to get for it?"

"Eight dollars a month, unfurnished, or \$10 as it is."

"But he is bound to pay your expenses if you required it, so I don't see how he hoped to make anything by forcing you to take a room outside."

"He expects me to go to work and pay my own expenses."

"Well, I shall call at his office tomorrow and rent the cottage myself."

"You, sir!" exclaimed Bob in surprise.

"Yes, then you can stay there unmolested and prosecute your search at your leisure. I am almost satisfied that your uncle hid money in the house, and if strangers came into possession of it they might accidentally find it, which would be a great pity, for your sake. By the way, what about this cousin you mentioned? Where does he live?"

In order to answer that question satisfactorially Bob had to go into a full explanation about Tom Barker, his visit of a day at the cottage, and his sudden and unexplained disappearance immediately after learning of his uncle's death. Of course, Bob didn't mention his suspicions concerning his cousin having any hand in Mr. Bland's death; nor did he hint that Barker's reputation wasn't as good as it ought to have been. Mr. Willcutt thought Barker's conduct very singular, to say the least, and said so.

"He'll probably turn up after a while, but you needn't have him stay with you at the cottage unless you have confidence in him. The property will be at my disposal as landlord until the administrator is authorized to offer it for sale, and then if I think it is to your interest I will buy it and present it to you."

"You are very generous, Mr. Willcutt. I am sure I——"

"There, there, say no more. Remember what I owe you. If I turned over to you every dollar I'm worth I could not fully repay you for saving my Bessie's life."

At that moment the supper bell rang, and the factory owner and his young guest left the library for the dining-room. After the meal Bob and Bessie sat together on the veranda and learned to know each other better. Needless to say that the impression each had formed of the other was fully confirmed, and they began to feel a strong and growing regard for one another.

Soon after it grew dark the moon came up and silvered the rippling waters of the lake.

It was a glorious night for a sail, and Bob ventured to ask Bessie if she would like to take a short trip.

She declared that nothing would please her more, and ran inside to ask her mother if she could go. After her narrow escape on the lake her mother rather objected to her taking any more chances. Mr. Willcutt, however, said that as the wind was very light, and he knew that Howard was an expert boatman, he guessed she would be perfectly safe, so she got a reluctant consent from her mother. She and Bob remained out for an hour, and then he brought her back to the house, after which he took his leave and returned to the cottage.

CHAPTTR IX.—A Brief Scrap.

Mr. Willcutt was as good as his word, and next day rented the cottage just as it was from the administrator for ten dollars a month.

Furthermore, he started Bob at work at the factory right away helping the hands who were moving the machinery and stock from the factory he had given up. A half dozen car loads arrived at a time, and the stuff was carted up from the freight yards as fast as it came in. The workers arrived by degrees, though not all of Mr. Willcutt's hands came to Cadiz.

Some preferred to remain where they were, and the factory owner supplied their places with new hands. Phil Daly's application was favorably acted on, and he was taken on to learn the business. He was not surprised to find that Bob

was already at work when he started in, for he had found out that Mr. Willcutt, the father of the girl Bob had saved, was the proprietor of the works.

"You'll be right in it here, Bob," he said, when they quit at noon for dinner, which they had brought with them.

"I hope so. I intend to learn this trade from the ground floor up," said Bob.

"You'll get every chance to do it, for the owner will see that things come your way."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that you'll have more chances than any one else."

"If you think I mean to take advantage of the obligation he feels under to me for saving his daughter's life, you're off in your calculation."

"Whether you take advantage of it or not, he's bound to see that you are pushed ahead."

"I don't expect to go ahead any faster than I deserve. If you pick things up quicker than me you'll get ahead quicker than I will."

Phil rather doubted it. He was sure that Bob would be favored in every way, since the factory owner could not but feel a strong interest in his success. This reflection excited no jealousy in Phil's mind, as he felt that Bob had risked his life to save Mr. Willcutt's daughter, and consequently deserved all the favors he might receive at the hands of the grateful father. Bob, however, wasn't looking for favors. He expected to stand on the same footing with the other employees of the establishment, and make his way to the front through his own exertions alone.

There were several branches to the business, but to learn the trade perfectly he would have to become familiar with all of them. He did not intend to jump from one to another until he felt himself thoroughly proficient in the one he was at. Of course he could not deny that he had a pull with the boss, but he did not mean to use that pull to secure any soft snap. He was there to learn the trade, and he was going to learn it.

He would be glad to work himself up to a foremanship in time, and if eventually he got to be superintendent, it was only what his ambition pointed to as the goal to be aimed at. To be worthy of filling that exalted position with credit to himself and profit to the works, he would have to master the trade from A to Z. Well, he was young, and there was no reason why he shouldn't accomplish that in the long run. Others had done it, why not he?

So Bob worked away in the same department with Phil Daly, both occupied with the same line of work. At night he returned to the cottage and entertained his friends there when they honored him with a visit, which was quite often. Quite often one or two of them would stay all night with him, and in the morning enjoy the breakfast that he prepared himself. He had a standing invitation from the Willcutts to take dinner with them on Sunday, which he never missed, as Bessie declared she always expected him. Of course he stayed to tea, too, and spent the evening. On these occasions Mr. Willcutt treated him with the familiarity of a friend.

At the factory it was different. There the proprietor treated him like any other employee, rarely coming in contact with him, and favoring

him in no way. But he watched the boy's progress with interest, and noted with satisfaction that he was becoming one of his smartest workers. There were three apprentices on the floor where Bob worked—himself, Daly and a boy named Jimmy Byke. Jimmy was something of a tough lad, and for some reason he took a dislike to Bob.

He first tried to draw Bob into a scrap by annoying him in divers petty ways, and finding that didn't work, for Bob considered it beneath his dignity to notice him, he preceeded to put up a job on him. Bob took pride in doing his work as well as he could. One day he was called away by the foreman to help one of the men in another part of the floor. Jimmy took advantage of his absence to monkey with the work he was engaged on so that it would show up to poor advantage when examined before shipment.

It happened that Phil Daly discovered what he was about, and without saying anything to him, hunted up the foreman and notified him. In the meantime Bob returned unexpectedly and caught Byke at his tricks.

"What in thunder are you doing, Jimmy Byke?" he cried.

Jimmy grinned and slipped back to his own job. Soon afterward the foreman came up and looked at the wire work Jimmy had been trying to spoil.

He made no remark to Bob about it, nor did the boy make any complaint to him, but ten minutes later Byke got the bounce from the works. He went off as savage as a hungry hyena, and with the idea in his head that he owed his discharge to Bob.

"I'll get square with that lobster, see if I don't," he muttered vengefully. "I'll lay fur him with my crowd and knock his block off. I'll bet when we get through with him he won't go to work for a week. And that won't be all I'll do to him, either. I'll git him out of that factory somehow, if I die fur it," and Jimmy Byke wagged his bullet head in a very determined way. "He ain't nothin' but a dood anyway, and I hate doods wus than p'ison. Thinks he's a lot better'n me. I'll show him whether he is no not, bet your sweet life."

Jimmy went off to hunt up such members of his crowd as he knew were not working. He found a bunch of his cronies in a vacant lot playing ball.

"Hello, Jimmy, what you doin' out at this hour?" asked ont of them.

"Got the bounce."

"What, from the factory?"

"Yep."

"What for?"

Jimmy gave his own version of the trouble, and, of course, laid the blame for his summary discharge on Bob Howard.

"You ought to get square with him," said his friend.

"You kin bet I'll git square with him. I want you fellows to help me do it."

"We'll help you. What do you want us to do?" asked one of the youths.

"We'll lay for him to-night when he leaves the factory and knock the stuffin' out of him."

The others agreed to help Jimmy lay Bob out,

and then resumed their playing, Jimmy joining in the game, and thinking it a lot better than toiling in the shop. Work at the factory stopped at half-past five. Bob and Phil Daly usually came out together and walked a couple of blocks in each other's company. On this occasion the foreman of their department detained Bob after he had changed his clothes and was ready to depart, as he wanted him to carry several packages of wire work to Mr. Willcutt's home, the proprietor having instructed him to send the fancy wire articles by the boy.

Jimmy and his crowd were waiting at the corner for Bob to come along. They had selected this spot because the corner was a vacant lot surrounded by a wooden fence, and because most of the factory employees went off in the other direction, and Bob was not likely to get any help from his friends. Jimmy had directed some of his cronies to tackle Phil Daly, who he expected would be with Bob, and hold him off while the rest, including himself, made matters warm for the real object of their attack. Soon after work stopped at the shop Jimmy saw Daly coming along alone. This rather surprised him, so leaving the bunch, he strolled up to Phil and asked him where Bob Howard was.

"What do you want with him?" asked Daly, curtly.

"I want him to git the foreman to take me back."

"You don't deserve to be taken back. You tried to put that job he was working at on the bum, just to get him in trouble."

"I was mad at him, but I'm sorry now I tried to hurt him," replied Jimmy, trying to assume a penitiant look.

"Yes, your're sorry because you got it in the neck. I don't believe the foreman will take you back even if Bob asked him to, and I doubt if Bob will do it. You have gone the limit with him, and he isn't sorry you are out of the shop."

At that moment Jimmy saw Bob come out of the shop door, with three or four bundles under his arms, and head that way, so he said no more, but turned on his heel and rejoined his friends, while Daly went on his way.

"He's comin', fellers," said Jimmy. "Be ready to tackle him as soon as you see me sail in. Git hold of the bundles and chuck 'em over the fence into the lot."

Bob came along unsuspecting of the trouble that was in store for him. As he started across the street, Jimmy, followed by his crowd, advanced so as to intercept him. The moment Bob spied his enemy, and noticed the bunch in his wake, he began to sent a scrap. He knew Jimmy Byke was aching to mix things up with him, and he believed the hard youth meant to bring things to an issue now, and had fetched his friends to see the fun.

"If that's his game, I'll give him all he wants," muttered Bob, holding the bundles so that he could drop them in a minute. The moment Bob reached the opposite curb Jimmy walked up to him in a threatening way.

"You got me thrown out of the shop, and I'm going to put it ail over you for tellin' on me, you blamed lobster," he said.

Then he doubled up his fist and aimed a blow

at Bob's face. Bob ducked, let go of his bundles and landed a clip on Jimmy's eye that sent him staggering against the fence. The crowd behind uttered a shout and closed in on Bob. Biff! Bob's fist landed like a sledgehammer on the jaw of one of his tormentors, and the boy measured his length on the ground. The plucky lad's prowess staggered the rest of the bunch, and they scattered like sheep. Jimmy had had all he wanted, and he sneaked off in the opposite direction. Bob had won a quick and easy victory, and he laughed when he saw his adversaries making off as fast as they could go.

"There wasn't much fight in either Jimmy Byke or his crowd," he said to himself. "Jimmy thought he was going to put it all over me, but that clip in the eye seemed to alter his mind. I'll bet that other chap's jaw hurts him, for I let him have it as hard as I could, and I lamed my knuckles. I guess they won't tackle me again. They have learned that I can take care of myself even against six of them."

Thus speaking, he continued on his way to the little wharf.

CHAPTER X.—What Bob Saw in the Looking-glass.

Bob carried the bundles to the cottage and got his supper before starting in his saidboat for the Willcutt home. Mr. Willcutt was on the veranda alone when he arrived, and he asked the gentleman what he should do with the packages.

"Lay them down over yonder and the gardener will take charge of them by and by," replied the factory owner. "I'm much obliged to you for bringing them here."

"You are welcome, sir," said Bob, depositing the bundles one on top of the other in a corner.

"Sit down. Have you made any discoveries at the cottage yet?"

"No, sir. The carpet is tacked down snug all over the room used by my late uncle, and there isn't a break in it anywhere, so he couldn't have hidden his money under the floor. As for the walls, they're as solid as walls usually are. I have thoroughly examined every piece of furniture without success. There does not seem to be a secret drawer or receptacle in any of them. Neither has his trunk a false bottom. I don't see that the prospects of finding any money are very encouraging."

"Bob's report of his efforts to find his uncle's presumed reserved store of money was rather disappointing.

"It is certainly very singular, in the light of your uncle's intimations to you at various times, and particularly his opposition to you seeking outside employment on the ground that it wasn't necessary for you to work, that on his death no money should be found in the house," said Mr. Willcutt, evidently much puzzled by that state of affairs. Bob made no reply. He was deliberating whether or not to confide in the factory owner his suspicions concerning his cousin, Tom Barker.

His hesitation was not due to any want of confidence in his employer, but to a natural reluctance of showing up a member of his family

in a bad light. While he was weighing the matter it suddenly occurred to him that the fact of no money being found after Mr. Bland's death reflected upon himself. He remembered that the public administrator had catechized him pretty sharply on the subject, as if he suspected the boy had taken possession of his uncle's money, intending to keep it and say nothing about it.

Perhaps Mr. Willcutt might entertain a similar suspicion, but would not, of course, utter a hint about it. The very idea of falling the least bit in the estimation of Bessie's father was too much for him to stand, and so he decided to tell Mr. Willcutt everything. This he did, and that gentleman heard him with not a little surprise.

"I'm afraid this cousin of yours is a rascal of the first water," said the gentleman. "It looks as if he was the cause, maybe unintentionally, of your uncle's death, and that he deliberately robbed the house while you were away, covering up his tracks in an artful manner. You will probably never see him again. Doubtless by this time he is a long distance from here with his ill-gotten money and such other articles of value as he picked up about your uncle's room. Even if he were caught the crime could hardly be brought home to him. The only real bit of evidence against him is probably the ring you found, and which you turned over to the police. He would, no doubt, swear he never owned it, and his word would be as good as your unsubstantiated testimony. I guess you may as well give up your search."

Bob thought so, too, since it promised no results.

Bessie now came on the scene, and she and Bob took a walk around the grounds together for an hour or so, after which he returned to the cottage in his boat. Thus the weeks passed and Bob made good progress at his trade. At his old factory Mr. Willcutt had bought all the wire he used in his business, but when he put up his new factory in Cadiz he added to his establishment a complete wire-making plant, and a capacity largely in excess of his own wants. It was originally his intention to start Bob at work in this mill, as he intended to make the manufacture of wire his chief business, but the failure of the machinery to arrive when promised caused him to put the boy into one of the wire goods departments for the time being. Three months elapsed before the mill was ready to start up, and then Bob was at once transferred to it. He was delighted with the change, for he was anxious to learn the trade of wire-making.

It was the groundwork of the whole wire industry, and to rise to become the superintendent of the works, as Mr. Willcutt had intimated to him that he wished him to do, it was necessary that he should be thoroughly acquainted with the process. Bob had the idea, in common with most people, that wire is drawn hot. His first week in the mill dispelled that impression, for he found that wire, during all stages of its drawing, is cold.

Bob's first work was to draw on a truck the rods, about an inch in diameter, composed of Swedish iron, and imported by Mr. Willcutt for the purpose, to the forge to be pointed at one end. This pointing was done in order to facilitate the

entrance of the rods into the die. Bob had all sorts of work to attend to at first, and it was two weeks before he was called on to help the workmen at one of the drawing machines. It was then he understood why the rods were pointed.

"How do you like your new job?" asked Phil Daly one afternoon when they left the works together.

"First class. I always wanted to know how wire was made, and now I'm finding out."

"How much have you learned so far?"

"Not a whole lot. Rome wasn't built in a day, you know."

"That's true. A fellow can't learn a trade in a minute."

"I was helping on one of the drawing machines today."

"What's a drawing machine?"

"They are the machines that turn the iron rods into wire—that is, the iron wire we use in this business."

"But we use copper and brass wire, too—on our fancy articles."

"I know, but we don't make that in the mill."

"How is the wire drawn?"

"Well, you see each machine is equipped with a die of a different size. The die on the machine I'm attached to at present is made of steel, about six inches in length, and about two inches in width, and contains holes of different sizes. The holes are larger at one end than the other, the wire entering at the large end and passing out at the other. When I say wire I don't really mean wire. The iron has to go through the entire process before it can be properly called wire."

"Tell me all about it. I'm interested."

"I can't. You'll have to wait till I learn. I just know a little bit of the first stage where the rods are reduced in diameter and increased in length. Every time the wire is drawn through a small die-hole it becomes narrower, and its length is continually increasing."

"What do you do with the chips?"

"What chips?"

"Why, when the wire is drawn through a hole and gets smaller it must leave chips behind."

Bob laughed.

"That's what I thought, but I know better now. There are no chips. The particles of iron are crowded back as the wire passes through the smaller aperture in the die, and there is no waste whatever."

"Gee! Is that so? Who'd have thought it?"

Bob had by this time told Daly about all he had learned so far, and they parted at the corner where they were standing. It was now well along in the fall, and the sun had set by the time Bob reached the cottage. He had lived all alone there, but he didn't mind it a bit.

No one ever disturbed him, and some of his friends came over nearly every night except Sunday, when they understood he was not at home.

He had put an end to the tree-route by which he believed his cousin, Tom Barker, had effected entry into the cottage, by way of his room, by sawing off the stout limb that projected toward the roof. He hated to do it, but he was afraid some tramp might take advantage of it while he was away at work, and steal many things of value that were in the place. Mr. Willcutt had pre-

sented him with a small revolver, as he thought the boy required something to protect himself with.

Bob kept it under his pillow at night, and he brought it downstairs in the morning and placed it in the lower drawer of the dresser in the kitchen. While working around the kitchen, preparing his meals, he always left the door open, if the weather was fair, otherwise the tops of both windows. He believed in fresh air, and plenty of it. It was half-past six by the clock on the afternoon in question when Bob entered the cottage and started up the fire.

Previous to this he had tried all the windows on the ground floor to make sure they had not been tampered with since morning. Everything appeared to be as he had left it, the front door doubly bolted and locked, and all the windows upstairs closed except the one in his own room.

He was hungry after his hard day's work, so he cooked himself a generous layout of bacon, eggs and fried potatoes, with a pot of coffee.

This, with plenty of bread and butter, and a pie he had brought home with him, made a famous supper, and he enjoyed it hugely. He was sitting back in his chair, gazing meditatively out of the open door, and thinking about the fine trade he was acquiring under particularly favorable auspices, when he heard a sound behind him. He might not have noticed it only everything was still, even the air outside being quite calm. It was the creaking of a door and Bob's back was toward the door leading into the hall.

It was a suspicious sound, for doors do not, as a rule, move themselves, and Bob was on the alert in a moment. He didn't move, however, or even turn his head, as he would have done had the sound been more pronounced, for his first impression was that the noise might have been occasioned by the cracking of the woodwork, though it was true that the house had been built so long that the framework was pretty well set. A minute elapsed and then the sound came again—twice this time. Bob was about to get up and investigate, at the same time putting his hand to his hip pocket and pulling out his revolver, which he had put there as a precaution on entering the kitchen, when his eyes rested on a looking glass attached to the wall directly in front of him.

It was only a small glass, about a foot by a foot and a half in size, but in it Bob saw his face, and about half of the door behind him, reflected. After inspecting the fastenings of the front door when he first entered, he had closed the door in question tight. The looking glass showed him that it was now open about three inches, and further, that the aperture was slowly growing wider each moment. Such a spectacle would have given most any person, situated as Bob was alone in an old house, a creepy feeling. Bob however, was a nervy lad, and not easily frightened.

"There is some intruder in the house after all," he thought, keeping his gaze on the mirror. "Whoever it may be is behind that door, and if I keep perfectly quiet he'll show himself, and then—well," as he quietly cocked his revolver under his jacket to deaden the sound, "there'll be something doing."

The door kept right on opening, apparently of

its own volition, until the boy saw the fingers of a hand upon the edge of it. At that moment it struck Bob that the intruder, when he looked into the room, would see the mirror right ahead, and catch his (Bob's) eyes in the glass staring at him. That would cause him to beat a quick retreat. So the boy placed one elbow on the table, bent his head forward, and looked through his partly open fingers. Presently a head was cautiously pushed through the opening in the door.

It was a man's head, and Bob caught a clear view of his face as he looked into the room. He almost spoiled things by the start he gave, for the countenance he saw was that belonging to Tom Barker.

CHAPTER XI.—Barker's Confession.

"My cousin, Tom Barker," breather Bob. "So he's come back. How the dickens did he get into the house, and what was his object in entering on the sly? He's looking at me pretty hard, and his look isn't the most pleasant in the world. Does he intend to attack, or—ah, the rascal!"

The last words were drawn from Bob when he saw Barker step forward and slowly raise a cudgel he held in his hand. His intention was evident—to strike Bob down as soon as he got within reach. Bob let him advance three paces, and then as Barker raised his stick higher the boy suddenly wheeled around and covered his cousin with his revolver. Barker started back as if he had trod on a venomous reptile, and uttered a smothered imprecation.

"Well, Tom Barker, what brings you here, and what are you up to?" asked Bob, coolly.

His cousin glared at him without making any reply.

"Kindly drop that club or I'll drop you," continued Bob. "Thought you'd catch me unawares, did you? You see your mistake. I'm a weasel, and sleep with both eyes wide open. I can see what's going on behind me, too, for I saw you come in at that door as softly as though you were treading on eggs."

"Point that gun another way, Bob Howard," growled Barker. "What do you mean by covering me with it?"

"You've got a most magnificent nerve, Cousin Barker, which, under other circumstances, I might admire. Stop! Don't you dare try to go back through that door. If you do you'll be carried out of here on a stretcher. If you think I don't mean business, try me."

"Why—why, what's the matter? This is a fine reception you are giving me," blustered Barker.

"I'm giving you what you deserve. There's a chair in the corner, sit down in it, and don't forget to drop that stick—drop it, do you hear?" added Bob, so sharply that Barker let it fall with an imprecation. "Now sit down. I'm not going to tell you again. Do as I say, or take the consequences."

Barker moved over and sat down.

Bob got up and closed the door through which his cousin had entered, but he never removed his eyes from the man.

"Now, Barker," he said, after picking up the cudgel, "why did you make yourself scarce right after our uncle's death?"

"What business is that yours?" replied Barker, ungraciously.

"I'd like to know for reasons."

"What reasons?"

"Serious ones. You are suspected of having caused Uncle Hiram's death."

"What!" gasped Barker, starting up in his chair.

"Sit down."

"How dare you accuse me of such a thing?"

"You also robbed him of every cent he had."

"It's a lie!" cried Barker, hoarsely.

"By the way, Cousin Tom, what become of that snake ring you wore that day on the middle finger of your right hand?" said Bob, observing that the ring was missing from his finger, which confirmed his belief in Barker's guilt.

"None of your business what became of it," snarled the man.

"Then you deny that you came back to this cottage after I sailed for the lake that day, climbed the oak tree outside, crawled in through my window, went to Mr. Bland's room, took him by surprise and drugged him, and then hunted around for the money you believed was somewhere in the room, found it, and then left the house?"

Tom Barker looked all taken aback, and for a moment he made no reply.

"Of course I deny it," he said, recovering himself. "Such a thing is simply ridiculous."

"I suppose you thought no one saw you enter or leave the house?"

"How could they when I wasn't——"

"In the house, eh? Don't lie. I have evidence that you were."

"What evidence?" asked Barker, with an uneasy look.

"Your ring, for one thing, which I picked up under my window."

The look of a savage animal driven into a corner came over the man's face.

"That's a lie," he said desperately. "I had to pawn my ring."

"You can tell that story to the Cadiz police."

"What have I got to do with the Cadiz police?"

"They're interested in you."

"Interested!"

"Yes, they've been looking for you. I shall take great pleasure in escorting you to the station-house this evening."

"If you do, may I be——"

"Blessed? That's a pleasure you'll never enjoy, Cousin Barker."

"Blame you! How long are you going to keep me here?"

"Until I am tired of your company. To come down to the present time. How did you get into the house?"

"I walked in when you wasn't looking."

"They say that the Old Boy loves a cheerful liar. You certainly take the cake. How did you get in?"

"I've told you," replied Barker, surlily.

"But you didn't tell the truth. See if you can't do better."

"Go to thunder!"

"It is evident you got in somehow. Perhaps you'll tell me what business brought you here?"

"I came to see you."

"Well, now that you see me, I'll listen to what you've got to say if you make it brief."

"I want what's coming to me."

"You'll get it, don't you worry, though whether you'll get all that's coming to you I can't say. That will depend on the judge and jury."

"Confound you! Don't be funny. You know what I mean. I want my half of my uncle's estate."

"Oh that's what you mean? I think you've got away with the biggest part already. You ought to give an accounting of what you stole when you did Uncle Hiram up."

"I never did him up. You must be crazy to accuse me of such a thing."

"All right. Have it your way; but my opinion is my own, and the police will also have something to say on the subject."

Tom Barker made no reply, and he certainly did not look pleasant.

"So you have the nerve to come to me and say you want half of Uncle Hiram's estate? Unless his money can be traced his estate consists of only this cottage, the ground on which it stands, and the furniture, all of which won't fetch a lot at public auction when the public administrator, who has charge of the estate, secures an order to dispose of it," said Bob.

"Look here, Bob Howard, this farce has gone far enough. Put up that gun and let's talk business. You lived with my uncle three years."

"Yes."

"Then you ought to know where he kept his money, and I'll wager he had a big pile."

"Uncle Hiram didn't favor me with his confidence in that respect. I never had the least idea how much he was worth. All I know is that he kept a small sum on tap in his cash-box to meet current expenses. On the morning of the day you turned up I went to his room to get some money to pay for supplies I intended to purchase in the town. He opened the box and handed me a \$5 bill. When he shut the box there were several bills, the top one a \$10 note, remaining in it. When I met you at the wharf you saw me placing the supplies in the bow of the boat. Well, when that cash-box was opened, after his death, there wasn't a bill in it. Where did the money go to?"

"How should I know?"

"If you don't know, I don't know who does."

"You persist in accusing me of——"

"Robbing Uncle Hiram? Yes. And the man who robbed him was the cause, perhaps unintentionally, of his death," said Bob, in a ringing voice.

Barker said nothing.

His eyes were on the floor and he seemed to be thinking hard.

"Bob," he said at last, "am I suspected by the police as well as by yourself?"

"You are."

"They have no proof against me."

"They have the ring. Many a man has been hanged on less evidence than that. At any rate, it is a strong point against you. It is the founda-

tion on which the county prosecutor could weave a circumstantial case against you. This case has been greatly strengthened by your sudden disappearance from the scene. If you were an innocent man, why did you run away?"

"I didn't run away. I've been around here all the time."

"Then you've been hiding, which is just as bad."

"I've been hiding, yes, but not on that account. Now, Bob, if you'll let up on me and not put the police on to me, I'll tell you the truth."

"I won't make any bargain with you. I have no confidence in you anyway. When you came in this room on the quiet a while ago your intention was to brain me with this club. Don't attempt to deny it. I saw every move you made in that looking-glass yonder."

Barker uttered a low imprecation.

He understood how Bob had been able to turn the tables on him.

"What did you want to do me for?" went on the boy. "What have I ever done to you?"

"Nothing; but I wanted to get out of the house unrecognized. I didn't intend to hurt you much. Merely to stun you a little," admitted Barker.

"Is that the way you killed Uncle Hiram? You only intended to render him unconscious, but you went too far. Is that the way it happened? If you don't admit the truth I'll shoot you!" and he put his gun against the man's head.

Barker looked toward the door, and then gasped in frightened tones:

"For heaven's sake, don't kill me!"

"Confess!" roared Bob, making a threatening gesture.

Barker burst into a cold sweat and became panic stricken.

"Yes, yes! I'll confess!" he gasped.

"Go ahead, quick!"

The man now lost his nerve altogether and cried:

"I did not mean to kill him. I only wanted his money. I was hard up. I came here to borrow \$100 from him. He refused to let me have more than \$10. I knew he had loads of coin, and his meanness made me ugly. I determined to take by force what he would not give up willingly. After my uncle went back to his room I took advantage of your short absence to the well to unlock one of the windows in the kitchen. You spoiled me there by trying the windows before we left. You took me across the creek at my request. That was only a blind on my part. I judged you would be away several hours, and my purpose was to put my scheme through before you returned, and then take a train West. After you went down the creek I undressed and swam across, ferrying my clothes on some boards I fastened together. I was about to try and break into the house through one the windows when I noticed that tree limb that went as far as your room window. I got in as you described, then——"

"You went down to the kitchen and clogged up the keyhole in the door," said Bob. "Admit it!" and he moved the pistol suggestively.

"Yes. I thought you might return unexpectedly, and I wanted to keep you out."

"So I thought," replied the boy, dryly. "Go on!"

"Then I went to my uncle's room. I had a bottle of chloroform in my pocket which I had bought to help an aching tooth. I wet a handkerchief with it, and stealing upon him, threw it over his face. He struggled a bit and then was still. I held the cloth a few moments longer and took it away. He fell back in his chair, and I figured he would sleep for several hours. I first helped myself to the money in the box. It amounted to about \$8. I was disgusted, and ransacked his desk, but found no more."

"Then you went through his trunk," said Bob. "I did, but he had nothing I wanted in it. I searched the room and everything in it, but I didn't get a cent. I was puzzled, for I knew he had plenty of money somewhere on the premises, since he never had any confidence in banks. I was at a standstill when I happened to look at my uncle. His eyes were open and his jaw had fallen. I was paralyzed. I only intended to make him sleep. I examined him closer and saw that he was dead. Then I felt I had killed him, though I had not meant to harm him. He was an old man, and could not stand what a younger person could. Besides, his heart was probably weak. I was staggered, and did not know what to do. I wanted to get away as fast as I could. It struck me to make it appear as if he had committed suicide. I laid him forward on the desk and put the handkerchief under his face. Then I left the house and walked for miles into the country. Afterward I turned up at the house, as you know. Now you know everything. Put up your pistol."

Bob listened to his story like one who was hearing it for the second time. He replaced the pistol in his pocket. Barker's confession was merely a confirmation of what he had already figured out as the truth himself.

"I'm glad you are not a murderer in thought as well as in deed, Tom Barker," he said. "Your statement is evidently true."

"Now that you have the facts, are you going to hand me over to the police? Remember, I did not mean to kill the old man."

"No. You are free to go, and I advise you to give Cadiz a wide berth."

"But I don't want to go yet."

"Why not?"

"I want to find our uncle's hidden money. It's somewhere in this house. Let us hunt for it together, and then we'll divide up even. After that I'll go away, and you'll never see me again, which, I guess, won't break your heart."

"If it's in the house it's hidden pretty snugly. I've searched every part of Uncle Hiram's room, and every article of furniture, but I couldn't find a trace of money. So I came to the conclusion you had found and carried it off," said Bob.

"No such luck. I wish I had. I've been here all the afternoon looking for it, but I was no more successful than yourself. I am satisfied it is not in that room, but in some other part of the house. Will you join me in a general search?"

"No, I'd rather not."

"Why not? Want to keep it all yourself if you find it?"

"No, though that is probably what you would do if you found it. The fact is, I don't fancy your society. You made your way into the house with the secrecy of a thief, and you have no right here."

"I have as much right here as you have."

"You are mistaken. You have the same rights in the estate as I have, that's all. This house has been rented by my employer, Mr. Willcutt, and I am looking after it for him. He has some idea of buying it when it is offered for sale. So you see you are trespassing when you enter this cottage without an invitation."

"I have a right to look for my uncle's hidden money," replied Barker, doggedly.

"You have no right to search these premises for any purpose, after what you have done."

"I am entitled to half of the money."

"You are if any is ever found. If I discovered it by accident to-morrow I should turn it over to the public administrator, as a part of my uncle's estate, to be ultimately divided between you and me."

"You'd be fool enough to do that, eh? Don't you know he'd reap a fat percentage out of it? What he didn't know wouldn't worry him. If you found the money you should turn over half to me and keep half yourself, saying nothing about it. Then no political office-holder would get a rake-off."

"Well, we won't discuss the matter further. I'm going to bed, so I shall have to ask you to leave. You can send me word where a message will reach you, so that in case any of your uncle's money should turn up I will be able to notify you."

"You won't put the police on me now you have my confession?"

"No. Your confession to me amounts to nothing as evidence against you. You could repudiate it. You've got to keep away from this house, however. If I find that you have been here while I'm at work, my promise to shield you will be considered off, and I will inform the police of your presence in this locality."

Bob pointed to the door, and Barker, without another word, passed out into the night.

CHAPTER XII.—Bob's Fresh Efforts to Find His Uncle's Money.

After Tom Barker had taken his departure, Bob made a tour of the house to try and find out how his disreputable cousin had effected his entry. He was unable to find the slightest clue, and was greatly puzzled over the kitchen. He went down there and looked around. He found that one of the gratings that admitted light and air could easily be removed and afterward replaced, as the fastenings were broken.

"I'll bet this is the way he got in. I don't see any other way," thought Bob. "I'll put a kibosh on his repeating the trick."

He got a hammer and nails and secured the grating. He also made the others stronger than they had been. Then he went to bed.

He did not get asleep immediately, his thoughts being occupied with the interview he had had with Tom Barker. The real cause of his uncle's

death was now satisfactorily established. He could hardly consider Barker a murderer, since he had not intended to compass the old man's death; but nevertheless he was a very guilty man.

Bob hoped that he never would see him again, but he was afraid he would, and in as unexpected a way as before. Finally he dropped asleep and did not awake till his usual hour for rising. When he got back from work that afternoon he not only made an unusual careful survey of the cottage from the outside, but with his revolver in his hand he went from room to room to make sure he had no undesirable visitor on the premises. Of course the only undesirable visitor he looked for was his cousin.

Having satisfied himself on this point, he returned to the kitchen, cooked his supper and ate it. Then his thoughts reverted to Barker's statement that he believed the missing money was hidden in some other part of the house than the late Mr. Bland's private apartment.

"It hardly seems reasonable that he would keep his money, if he had much, anywhere but under his own eyes," thought Bob, reflectively. "He could easily have had a secret receptacle made under the floor of his room. Come to think of it, such a spot may exist there in one of the corners. I didn't look for such a thing when I saw that the carpet was fastened close down all over the room. My uncle may have taken up and replaced the end of the carpet whenever he wanted to reach his hoard. It won't take long for me to investigate the floor under the ends of the carpet. I will do it on Sunday morning."

The appearance of one of his friends at that moment interrupted his train of thought, and he did not think of the matter again till he went to bed. Sunday came two days later, and after breakfast he locked up downstairs and devoted the entire morning to an investigation of the floor of his late uncle's room. Nothing came of it, for he found the floor perfectly solid all the way round. He examined the desk again for a false bottom or a secret drawer, but there appeared to be none in it. Then his thoughts reverted to the vacant room below, secured by the Yale lock. He had never been inside of it during the three years he lived at the cottage, nor had he ever seen his uncle go near it either. As the windows had never been opened, nor the room swept, he judged that it must be in a pretty musty and dirty condition. After his uncle's death he had looked for the key, intending to clean it out, but the key could not be found. He tried to open the closed blinds on the outside, thinking to get in that way, but found they were securely nailed up on the inside. So he let the room alone as he did not care to destroy the blinds, or to force the door, not believing it was worth while, since he had no use for the room. At first it struck him as singular that a Yale lock should be on the door of a vacant room, but concluded that it may have been put on by the former tenant, and so dismissed the matter from his mind. Now, however, that the money Mr. Bland was supposed to have possessed was not to be found in his own room after the strictest kind of search, Bob began to wonder if the old man had hidden it in the vacant room. This would account for the Yale lock being on the

door, and also for his refusal to let him clean the room up.

"I wonder where the key went to?" thought Bob, that Sunday morning after he had abandoned the search in his late uncle's room. "If it was of the first importance to Uncle Hiram, I should think it would have been attached to his ring of keys. At any rate, it ought to be in one of the drawers of his desk. I have already found that it wasn't on his key-ring, nor in a drawer of the desk. It's singular where it could have gone to, provided my uncle had occasion to use it, and he certainly would have occasion to use it if he kept his money somewhere in that vacant room."

Eager as Bob now was to inspect that room, he did not care to break the door down in order to satisfy his curiosity.

It was time for him to get ready to go to the Willcutts for dinner, as had become his regular custom of a Sunday, so he went to his room, put on his good clothes and started off in his boat. When Bob began work at the mill next day, his services were called into requisition at a receptacle called a "nealer." It was a large iron vessel, wider at the bottom than at the top, built over a furnace, and filled with brick from the bottom to about four inches above the outer edge. The first batch of wire in course of manufacture had to be coiled in this vessel, one coil on top of the other, and the smaller ones within the larger. Bob worked away some time at this job, and when the coils had been placed in position, the nealer was covered with an immense cover, which the foreman called a bonnet, and all the seams through which air might enter were then covered with clay, so as to render everything air-tight. After that the vessel was gradually heated to a red heat, and kept in that condition several hours. Then the draughts were shut down, and it was allowed to cool gradually.

He was greatly interested in the different processes through which the iron rods were gradually developed into wire of various degrees of fineness. He paid strict attention to everything he was called on to do, and he did his work as well as he could, thereby attracting the favorable notice of the foreman. When work shut down Monday afternoon, Bob hunted up a locksmith and consulted him about the feasibility of opening a Yale lock without a key.

"Isn't there any other way of getting into the room?" asked the locksmith.

"Yes by wrenching off a blind nailed on the inside and cutting out a pane of glass in the window."

"Better do that than smash the door, for the tumblers of a Yale lock can't be picked through the narrow keyhole."

So Bob went to a hardware store and bought a glazier's diamond. He postponed trying to enter the room till the following Sunday morning, as he wished to do the job by daylight. When the time came, after breakfast on that day, he got his tools and tackled the outside blind of one of the windows. It was so well nailed that he had to tear it all to pieces before he could get at the window. The panes were so thickly coated with dust that it was impossible to see through them. Bob cut one out, reached in his hand and turned the catch

He found it impossible to shove up the sash, neither could he pull down the upper, so the only conclusion he could reach was that they were tightly nailed. It was now apparent that he couldn't get in that way without smashing the whole of the lower sash, and that he didn't want to do, at least not until he had got another sash to replace it. He looked into the room through the hole he had made by removing the pane, and found it pretty dark. As far as he could make out by his partial examination there wasn't anything at all in the room. While he was staring at the blank surroundings, he was suddenly seized from behind and pulled away from the window. A noosed rope was dropped over his head and pulled tight around his arms, holding them as if in a vise. Thus he was rendered helpless before he quite realized what he was up against. Then one of his two captors stepped in front of him and looked at him with a grin of satisfaction. The man was Tom Barker, looking more disreputable than ever.

CHAPTER XIII.—A Prisoner.

"What does this mean, Tom Barker?" Bob asked indignantly.

"It means that you are our prisoner," replied Barker, with a chuckle.

"What's your object in treating me this way?"

"Merely to get out of the way a while so that I can continue my hunt for my uncle's money. I asked you to stand in with me on this thing, but you refused, so I had to hunt up somebody else who I could depend on. I see you have started in to investigate this part of the house. I guess you hit the right trail. Me and my partner will save you the trouble of exerting yourself any further this fine Sunday morning. You labor all the week hard at the wire factory, and ought to rest on a Sunday," grinned Barker. "As neither of us have labored anything to speak of for some little time, why, it's only fair that we should relieve you of the work you had in hand. We'll also relieve you of your share of the old man's money if we are so lucky as to find it. If we don't find it—but we won't look on the dark side of the picture. Never cross a bridge before you come to it, is a good motto, and one I always follow. Now, Fletcher, we'll take this enterprising youth into the house and tie him up in the cellar. There he'll have time to ponder over the uncertainties of life."

"You're a nice chap to treat me this way when I let you off from going to jail," said Bob angrily.

"It's your own fault. You ought to have joined me in the search."

"I didn't care to do so."

They led Bob down into the cellar of the cottage and tied him to one of the square wooden supports of the foundation. Then hoping that he would not feel lonesome all by himself, they left him and returned to the window, where they proposed to continue operations. As Bob watched Tom Barker and his companions depart, his reflections were not the most cheerful in the world. If the late Mr. Bland's money was concealed in the vacant room, and the two men found it, that would be the end of it as far as Bob was concerned. The boy knew that without Barker telling

him so. As the nearest neighbor was an eighth of a mile away, and there was scarcely any travel at all on a Sunday along the road which the cottage faced, there was but little chance that the two rascals would be interrupted in their work. The only chance that Bob could figure on was the appearance of one of his friends on the scene, and that was but a forlorn one, for he seldom had a visitor on a Sunday morning, and of course nobody called in the afternoon or evening, because they understood that he was always away then.

Presently he heard a crash outside. He knew what that meant. Barker and his companion had smashed in the lower sash. He heard some minor sounds after that for a moment or two and then there was silence. Perhaps five minutes passed after that when Bob was startled by what sounded like the combined reports of several firearms, followed by muffled cries. The sounds came from inside the house, and, apparently, from the empty room.

"What in thunder was that?" ejaculated Bob, listening intently. "Sounded like three or four pistol shots in rapid succession, and I thought I heard cries of distress on top of them. I don't hear anything more. Seems kind of funny to me. I wonder what it all means. There isn't anybody in the house but those two rascals, so I don't see why there should be any shooting. Guess my ears deceived me."

More time passed and still the house remained as silent as a tomb.

"Can it be that they have got out of the window and made off without me hearing them? If they have, that's a pretty good sign that they have found what they came after, and I am out and injured to the extent of my share in my uncle's money. Pretty hard luck that the legacy Mr. Bland evidently intended for me should be appropriated by the man who brought about his death, and his rascally associate. Things don't always turn out in real life as they do in books, where the right party gets what he is entitled to, and the villain catches it in the neck."

At that moment Bob heard a shrill whistle on the outside of the house. He recognized the whistle as Phil Daly's. He hadn't expected Phil to call that morning, but then he never could tell when his friend would take the notion in his head to come over to see him. Daly always announced his approach by a peculiar whistle, and Bob, if around, always showed himself at once. Under the present circumstances Bob couldn't show himself, and if the kitchen door was shut, he feared that Phil would go away in a few minutes. Phil whistled again, as he noticed that the kitchen door was slightly ajar, which was enough to tell him that Bob was not far off. As Bob still failed to respond, Phil opened the door and walked inside.

He walked to the cellar door, pulled it open and cried out:

"Are you down there, Bob?"

"Yes. I'm a prisoner here, tied to one of the posts. Come down and free me," replied Bob.

"A prisoner!" exclaimed Phil, in a tone of astonishment, springing down the stairs. "How's that? Why so you are," he added, when he saw his friend's situation. "Why who the dickens served you in this way?"

"A rascally cousin of mine. Get out your knife and set me free."

"I didn't know that you had any relatives since your uncle died."

"I've got one cousin, and he's the black sheep of the family. He turned up the day my uncle died, and then disappeared that same evening. To-day is the second time, to my knowledge, that he's been around since."

"He must be down on you like a carload of bricks to treat you in this way," said Phil, as he severed the final cord and Bob found himself free once more.

"Down on me! Don't mention it. He hates me like poison."

"If I hadn't come over to see you, you might have stayed here all day, and all night, too," said Phil.

"Maybe twice as long. Did you find the kitchen door open?"

"It was open about an inch."

"Lucky thing for me it was. You'd probably have gone away, had it been shut tight, under the impression that I was not here. I might have yelled till I was blue in the face, but you wouldn't have heard me outside."

By that time they were up in the kitchen.

"How did this cousin of yours come to catch you off your guard?" asked Phil.

Bob explained how he had started to try and get into the vacant room on the ground floor, which had been locked up ever since he had been in the house, the key to the door of which was missing, when he was captured by his cousin and companion.

"After tying me in the cellar the two chaps got into that room themselves to see what they could find there worth stealing," said Bob. "As I haven't heard them go away, I'm not sure but they're in here yet."

"Then we'd better keep shady till they go away."

"Not at all. I've got a club and a revolver in the kitchen. You take the club. There it is yonder," and Bob got out his gun. "Now we'll go around to the window they broke open and make things lively for them if they're about."

The boys started at once for the window. Bob got on the box he had placed under it when he began operations on the blinds and listened. No sound came from inside.

"I guess they've skipped," he said.

He thrust his head inside and looked around. What he saw caused him to utter an exclamation of mingled surprise and consternation.

CHAPTER XIV.—Conclusion

"What's the matter?" asked Phil.

Bob made no reply, but scrambled through the window in a hurry. He had seen two forms stretched silent and motionless on the floor in front of a large brass-bound box. He hardly needed to approach them to know who they were. Tom Barker lay on his back, and Fletcher half reclined on his side. What had happened to them Bob could not imagine, but there seemed to be little doubt that both were unconscious or dead. When he got close to them he saw that the latter was the case. There were two bullet holes in Barker's forehead just above his eyes,

while Fletcher was still bleeding from two wounds in his breast. Bob was paralyzed at the sight.

"Come in, Phil," he called. "There's been a tragedy here, and I can't figure out how it happened."

Daly got into the room much astonished at his friend's words. He was more astonished when he viewed the two bodies.

"They were trying to open that box when they were shot," said Phil.

"I would appear so. The key is in the lock. But how——"

"I know," cried Phil, suddenly. "Here, don't stand in front of that thing. It is loaded for business, or was. Better leave things as they are and send for the police."

"What do you mean?" asked Bob.

"What do I mean? There is probably something of value in that chest, and it's provided with a concealed set of revolvers, and the mechanism that sets them off when the box is monkeyed with by any one but its owner. I've heard of such contrivances before. They have been attached to doors and windows to give thieves who attempt to break into a house a warm reception. I'll bet if the lid of that box was lifted you'd get a surprise."

"Well, then, I'm going to lift it if I can," said Bob.

"I wouldn't. You can't tell what might happen to us," replied Phil.

"Maybe it's done all the damage it was intended to do. At any rate, we need not stand in front of it. Get over to that side."

Phil did so. Then Bob took a firm grip on the end of the lid and pulled it up. Nothing happened, but they saw how the men had met their deaths and the contrivance which had killed them. The box was provided with a false top, in the lock of which probably the key had been left, because Bob did not believe Barker had had the key in his possession. Arranged at even distances were four old-fashioned pistols, capable of firing but one shot each. Their muzzles inclined upward at an angle. To the trigger of each was attached a thin wire which connected with the lid in such a way that the moment it was lifted a few inches, enough to expose the muzzles of the pistols, the wires were simultaneously drawn to a tension that released the triggers, and the pistols were discharged. The bullets were sure to strike any mark within the space of two feet, and were pretty certain to find a bullet in any person who tried to open the box as he would a trunk. There was nothing but the pistol battery in the top tray of the box, and Bob saw that this shallow tray was, as we said before, merely a false top, and had no connection with the interior of the box proper.

"Well, what are you going to do, Bob? Notify the police at once, aren't you?" said Phil.

"I'm going to see what's in that box first. I feel pretty sure that it contains my late uncle's missing money. I wish Mr. Willcutt were here as a witness."

"What's the matter with going for him? He'll do anything to oblige you."

"Will you stay around here while I go? Of course, you needn't stay in this room. Just hang around outside," said Bob.

"Sure I will," consented Daly.

Bob fixed the lock so it wouldn't catch, and they made their way outside by way of the hall and the kitchen. He went right down to the landing, put off in his sailboat, and as the wind was favorable he made a quick trip around to the Willcutt property. He found the factory owner walking around his grounds. The gentleman was surprised to see the boy so early in the day, as he was not expected much before two o'clock. Bob lost no time in explaining the reason of his early call. The story he told of his capture by his cousin and another man, his imprisonment in the cellar, his rescue by his friend Daly, and their discovery of the tragedy which had taken place in the vacant room of the cottage, astonished the gentleman not a little.

"You mustn't open the box," replied Mr. Willcutt. "That is the right of the public administrator only, and it would not do for me to be present and be a party to such a thing. It is too bad that your uncle failed to make a will in your favor, which would have prevented the estate falling in the official's hands."

"Maybe he did make a will, and it's in the box," said Bob.

"That's true. I never thought of that. If there is a will, the public administrator will have to step down and out."

"Then I think I ought to be present when the box is opened."

"You can prefer your request to the official."

"But I can't make him open it in my presence, can I?"

"No. He can, and probably will, cause the box to be at once removed to his house."

"Suppose he found a will when he opened it, and knowing that its production would cause him to lose a fat commission, destroyed it, who but himself would know?"

"He would be assuming a grave risk."

"How would he if there was no evidence to show that such a will ever existed?" said Bob.

"I don't think you need fear he would do such a thing. He is under oath to perform the duties of his office honestly and correctly."

"In any case, I suppose I'll have to trust to his honesty. If I knew where the key of the box was, I'd take the risk of having a peep at what is inside of it."

Bob returned to the cottage without Mr. Willcutt, and sent Phil to town to report the facts to the police. As soon as his friend started off, Bob re-entered the chamber of death, and took another look at the contrivance which had carried disaster to Barker and Fletcher. While he was looking the box over he saw that it had no other key-hole. The box was brass-bound, and provided with a lot of knobs. Under the impression that one of these knobs had something to do with the matter, he pressed hard on each in turn. When he touched the third one to the right of the fake lock he heard a click. Instantly one of the brass patches directly under the false key-hole slipped aside and another key-hole appeared.

"If I only had the key, I'd be all right," thought Bob.

Then it occurred to him to try the key in the false lock. He did so, found it fitted, and turning it, unlocked the box. Almost the first thing he

saw was a legal document with the printed word "Will" at the top of it. He snatched it up, opened it, and found that it was the last will and testament of Hiram Bland. It only took him two minutes to see that he was his uncle's sole heir, Tom Barker's name not being mentioned at all.

He determined that he would see what was in the box, now it was open, so he examined its contents. He first took out a japanned box about a foot and a half in size. The key was in it. Opening it, he found it was full of packages of banknotes. Bob did not return the box of money to the box, but took it down and hid it in the cellar. Shortly afterward a police wagon drove up with Daly and three officers. Bob showed the policeman the contrivance that had caused the death of his cousin and Fletcher, and told them the story of what happened before the men entered the room. The bodies were then loaded on the wagon and taken to town. An hour later Bob started for the Willcutt home. After dinner he told Mr. Willcutt how he had opened the box after all, and told him what he found in it showing him the will.

Next morning Bob didn't appear at the works, but went with Mr. Willcutt to that gentleman's lawyer, to whom he turned over the will for probate. The lawyer told him that the first thing the judge would do would be to appoint a guardian for him, as none was mentioned in the will.

Bob turned to Mr. Willcutt and asked him if he would serve, and he said he would, so that matter was settled. During the next three years Bob worked steadily at the mill, and when he had mastered the knowledge of wire making, he was transferred to one of the factory departments to learn the wire goods trade. On his twenty-first birthday he became foreman of his department. A year later he was promoted to be assistant superintendent of the works. He also became engaged to Bessie Willcutt, and six months later they were married. He continued in his present position for three years, and then was put in full charge of the manufacturing business of his father-in-law.

Shortly afterward Mr. Willcutt sold him a half interest in the business. He was now on the high road to fortune, for not only was he worth nearly \$100,000 in his own right, but eventually he would come into complete control of the wire making and wire goods business through his wife, provided, of course, that he lived, and the chances were in his favor. He was bound to make a success of it, for he learned the trade from A to Z.

Next week's issue will contain "BUYING ON MARGIN; OR, THE BOY WHO WON MONEY."



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TRUTHFUL JAMES

or

The Boy Who Would Not Drink

By GASTON GARNE

(A Serial Story.)

CHAPTER VI—Jimmy's Engagement.

Just then the young man next to the speaker found a red ear, and, pulling her head down to his shoulder, snatched half a dozen kisses from her.

Finally some of the girls insisted upon Jimmy's going into the barn and throwing the young man who had so saucily challenged him.

"All right," said he. "I'll bet forty ears of red corn that I can throw him three time out of five," and he went off toward the end of the barn where the boys were drinking.

Soon there were heard screams of laughter and much yelling coming from that direction, and the girls listened eagerly, wondering what was the cause of it all.

Sally was the only one who really knew what was going on, and she regretted that she had let Jimmy go, for she knew that he had big odds against him.

The first man to seize Jimmy as he entered the barn was Henry Halstead. Jimmy knew that Halstead was at the head of the conspiracy against him, so he tripped his feet from under him, and he fell heavily to the floor.

When Jimmy and young Halstead went down on the floor of the barn, some four or five of the boys piled in on Jimmy, according to agreement, seized his arms and legs, and held him firmly a helpless prisoner.

One then seized him by his nose, while another sat aside of him and forced the mouth of the jug against his lips, and the others stood around, laughing and exclaiming:

"Help yourself, Jimmy!"

"It's good stuff and don't forget it!"

Suddenly Jimmy's left hand got loose from one of the boys, who could never explain how it happened, and landed with tremendous force against the fellow's jaw, with the result that the fellow's jaw was dislocated. Of course, then, the boy had to release his hold on the other hand, and his groans were heard above the racket; but no one suspected what had happened.

Jimmy himself knew that he had given some one a tremendous blow, but never even suspected the result.

He felt the contents of the jug pouring out on his mouth, and some of it entered his nostrils and almost strangled him.

Being practically strangled with the strong whisky, he struck right and left—anywhere to get free—seized the jug by the handle and smashed one of his assailants with it, and the fellow sank down unconscious.

Just then one of the young men who was near rushed out and exclaimed:

"By George, but Jimmy is a tough one and no mistake!"

Sally caught the young man by the arm and said:

"Tell me the truth, now. Are they fighting out there?"

"Yes."

"Is anybody hurt?" she asked.

"I don't know; but I should think so. Jimmy has broken a jug of whisky over Tom Smith, and Tommy doesn't know whether the stars are shining or not."

Quick as a flash Sally cried out:

"Girls, the boys are fighting in the barn, and we must put a stop to it."

That caused a general alarm, and some of the girls ran to Farmer Adams, who was quietly discussing whisky from another jug with some of his neighbors, and told him the story, and he instantly invited the other farmers to go into the barn with him and command the peace; so they rushed in and found Jimmy and the other boys in a writhing mass on the barn floor.

They saw Jimmy have hold of two of the boys, slamming their heads together with such force that the two victims of his physical strength were practically helpless and calling out at the top of their voices:

"Oh, oh!"

There was blood all over Jimmy's nose.

"Hello, boys! Hello!" sung out one old farmer.

"This won't do. You're spoiling the fun."

"Jimmy! Jimmy!" sung out old man Adams.

"Stop! Stop! You've wasted whisky enough to drown some of the boys," said another farmer.

"Well, they ought to be drowned," replied Jimmy. "They tried to force some of that down my throat; but not a drop did I swallow," and with that he slammed young Halstead against one of the boys with such force as to cause him to drop to the floor of the building.

Of course all the fun of the evening was spoiled. Sally saw Jimmy held by two farmers, so she rushed up to him, put both her hands on his shoulders and said:

"Oh, Jimmy, are you hurt? There's blood on your nose."

"No," said he. "That's blood from the other fellows."

"Well, Jimmy," said one of the old farmers who was holding to him, "if you can husk corn as well as you can fight, it looks to me as though you ought to be entitled to kiss every girl in the county, red ears or not."

"Well," said Jimmy, "I've had my share of kissing tonight, and if there is anybody who is not satisfied, I'm sorry for him."

"Well, Jimmy, here's another for good measure," laughed Sally Holmes, and she pressed her lips squarly against his.

"Oh, Sally," cried one of the girls, "you have got blood on your lips," and Sally seized her handkerchief and wiped her lips until it was stained with blood.

She looked at the stain on her handkerchief and ran out of the room, followed by two or three of the girls, laughing heartily.

The attempt to make Jimmy Watson drunk

was a dead failure; but the bloodshed that followed so frightened the girls that the fun was spoiled for the evening.

The girls were of the impression that some of the boys had been stabbed; but when the boys had washed their faces, it was learned that the blood that was seen had all come from bruised noses.

The young man who had been hit with the jug of whisky was the worst-looking chap of the lot.

The young man whose jaw had been knocked out of its socket suffered great pain of course, and one of his sisters in the party accused Jimmy of using brute force unnecessary.

Jimmy told her that in view of what the boys were trying to do to him, he had no apologies to make.

A physician was living half a mile away from the Adams farm, and he was sent for. Of course he found his patient in great pain and groaning as though his life was in danger.

The young man's sister was so wrought up that she wasted her vocabulary of abuse on Jimmy's head.

The pile of corn had been about two-thirds shucked, and one of the neighbors gave Adams a round scolding for having whisky at the husking for the young men present; but Adams retorted by saying that he had always done so all his life and had never had any trouble before.

The young man whose jaw had been dislocated was placed in an all right condition by the doctor.

"Jimmy," said the physician, "that must have been an ugly blow you gave that fellow."

"I gave him the best I had in stock," said Jimmy.

When the crowd of young people broke up, and Jimmy Watson led Sally Holmes out to his buggy and took his seat alongside of her, she said to him:

"Jimmy, I was never so proud of any one in my life as I am of you now."

"Thank you, Sally. That pays me for all my trouble this evening, and if you will go with me to the next husking, consider yourself engaged right now."

"I'll go with you, Jimmy, to every husking in the county."

"Good! Good! Why not say that you will go with me to all the huskings?"

"I will, Jimmy, if you wish me to."

"I do wish it; and another thing, I wish you would promise me to be my wife some day when you take a notion to marry."

"Goodness gracious! That's worth ten thousand ears of red corn," and his arm slipped around her waist and pressed her up to him, and their lips met.

CHAPTER VII.

Before they reached Sally's home she suggested to Jimmy that they keep the matter of their engagement a secret until such time as they thought best to divulge it.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Are you ashamed of it?"

"No, I'm not, but it is the girl's business to an-

nounce the engagement herself. There will be an immense amount of talk about it."

"Yes, of course," he assented, "and the talk has begun already. I expect to have to whip a few more fellows on your account, too. I don't mind that at all."

"Jimmy, don't you do any more fighting on my account," said she. "If anybody asks you if we are engaged, just refer them to me. Don't say yes or no. I want to set them to thinking and wondering; but be sure that you come and see me every Sunday and every Wednesday night."

"Oh, only twice a week, eh?"

"Well, I leave the other times in the week to your discretion. You can't neglect business on my account."

"Then leave me to be the judge as to whether or not I'm neglecting business when I'm courting my sweetheart."

That pleased her highly and she blushed and smiled, saying:

"Well, just come as often as you please, Jimmy, and I will always be pleased to see you. As I said a while ago, I'm the happiest girl in the county if not in the whole State."

Jimmy assisted her out of the buggy, and as he did so he pressed her hand to his lips and kissed it.

"Well," she ejaculated, "I really don't believe you love me half as much as you say, Jimmy, if you are satisfied with kissing only my hand."

Without a word he threw his arms around her neck and kissed her half a dozen times in rapid succession.

"That's the way a man ought to kiss his sweetheart. Now, good-night," and with that she ran into the house, while he sprang into his buggy and drove homeward.

"By George," he muttered to himself, "that's the sort of a girl to have. There's no foolishness about her at all. I'm sure that mother will be as proud of it as I am, and I will wake her up and tell her before I go to bed."

When he reached home he attended to his horse and buggy, locked the stable and then, in entering the house, made as much noise as he possibly could, with the intention of awakening his mother.

As he passed her door, going to his own room, she called to him:

"Did you have a good time, Jimmy?"

"Yes, mother. It was a lively crowd, but we didn't finish shucking all the corn."

"Why, what made the boys quit before they got through?"

"Oh, there was a little disagreement which I will tell you all about in the morning."

Then he hesitated for a few minutes trying to make up his mind how to announce his engagement to Sally Holmes.

Finally he hemmed and hawed and said:

"Mother, I've got some news for you."

"What is it, Jimmy?"

"Why, Sally Holmes and I are engaged to be married."

"What's that!" the widow exclaimed, springing up in her bed, and he repeated the announcement, saying:

"Sally and I are engaged to be married."

(To be continued)

Fame and Fortune Weekly

NEW YORK, MARCH 23, 1928

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INTERESTING ARTICLES

CITY PAWNSHOP OF PARIS REACHES RIPE AGE OF 150

The Paris "Monte de Piete," or city pawnshop, is 150 years old but there will be no birthday party.

It is, officially, the Credit Municipal and unofficially "My Aunt," merely a change in gender from the American appellation.

Private pawnshops are forbidden in France and the public loan institutions are supervised by the authorities to insure honest and efficient administration.

Pension claims are accepted as collateral for loans at only 1 per cent. a year, but other loans are at 8 per cent. At Toulouse and other cities loans are made without interest.

The only innovation of recent years has been the acceptance of automobiles "in hock."

TUESDAY WORST TRAFFIC DAY FOR THE LONDON UNDERGROUND

Berlin has its "blue" Monday, Paris its "blue" Wednesday, and now London has selected Tuesday as the "bluest" day of the week.

Experts of the London Underground system, by comparing the number of passengers, have concluded that Tuesday is the worst day of all business days of the week.

The underground figures show that on an average week day the tubes account for 1,029,631 fares, but on Tuesday the average drops to 980,235.

"We are mystified," says the officials, "and cannot explain the falling off in business, excepting to conclude that Tuesday, for some reason, is the 'blue' day of a great many of our patrons."

The big stores and shop keepers say their business on Tuesday is a little bit less than on other week days.

DECORATIONS ARE A PUZZLE IN REPUB- LICAN GERMANY

Decorations continue to cause trouble in Republican Germany.

The only distinguishing badge which can be awarded now for meritorious service to the country is the medal of the Red Cross Society, all decorations having been forbidden, under the new Constitution. There is, however, no tradition as to how it should be worn.

At a recent social function two Cabinet Ministers appeared with their Red Cross medals in the lapels of their evening dress coats. Hardly had they entered when they disappeared again. After their return to the hall it was remarked that the Minister who had worn his medal on the right side now had it fastened on the left, and the other vice versa.

Each had assumed of the other that he must know how to wear the badge, and seeing it on the opposite side from his own had withdrawn to rectify the supposed error.

INJURIES TO CHILDREN ENDED BY NEWARK SAFETY PATROL

Addressing members of the Newark Safety Patrol at a meeting in the Burnett Street Public School in Newark recently, Miss Annie E. E. Simmons said that not one child had been injured in Newark streets while the patrol was on duty since the inception of the plan in 1917.

She said that during the year 1916 ten children were injured and two were killed in the streets near schools. In 1917 the organization of the safety patrol, or junior police, was begun.

The patrol in Newark numbers about 1,800 children and is under the direction of Felix Dunn of the Newark Board of Education. The meeting recently was arranged by the Board of Education and the Automobile Legal Association, under whose auspices Miss Simmons appeared. Her topic was "The Relation of the Safety Patrol to the Motorist."

The safety patrol functions during and after school hours.

\$5,000,000 IS OFFERED TO GREAT SMOKY PARK

A \$5,000,000 appropriation to aid the establishment of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park in Tennessee and North Carolina has been made by the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial, it was announced recently by Beardsley Ruml, Director of the Memorial, according to the Associated Press.

The fund will be used, Mr. Ruml said, to match dollar for dollar each contribution received for the project. Work for development will be in charge of the Park Commissions of Tennessee and North Carolina, Mr. Ruml said.

The campaign to turn the Great Smokies into a National Park began Dec. 7, 1925, with a total quota for Tennessee and North Carolina of \$1,200,000. Then the campaign was taken to the Nation. The plan was to acquire the area, transfer it to the Government and have the country contribute to enlarging the park.

The Great Smokies have a wild grandeur unapproached by the Alleghanies or White Mountains. They contain eighteen peaks from sea levels, a swell as ravines, torrents and waterfalls, and the last great area of original deciduous forest in the South.

Pretty As A Picture

One of the greatest cases in which I was ever concerned for a few days promised to become a celebrated one.

A great jewel robbery is always a profound attraction to the British public. One was duly announced one morning in the very largest type, and it had the more interest because the victim was Lady Rachmore—a beautiful, young and deservedly popular peeress.

I and a superior officer were called in to investigate the matter, and both were equally amazed to find that the great robbery was in one sense a very small affair indeed.

Lady Rachmore was noted for her fine pearls and equally fine diamonds, but none of those were missing. The young baroness, however, plainly told Mr. Poynter that her distress would not have been half so great if some of those famous jewels had been stolen. The things abstracted from her jewel cases were old heirlooms of his lordship's family, and as her husband was absent at the time, the disaster was, of course, deemed a greater one on that account.

A list of the things showed why they were deemed of more than intrinsic value. I remember a specimen or two:

One diamond ring, the present of Alexander II, King of Scotland, to Hugh, Thane of Alloway (progenitor of Lord Rachmore).

One quaint ring of onyx, given by Louis XI to the Earl of Alloway, Ambassador of King Alexander.

One circlet of large size, the gift of Henry III of France to Guy, Earl of Alloway, Lieutenant of the Garde l'Ecosse.

Now, all this was very perplexing to us as officers. Although the pearl and diamond necklaces, tiaras, coronets, pendants, stars, etc., were in the same safe, these were untouched. We had no common thieves to discover—that was perfectly certain. No one outside the house would run the risk of breaking in and leave behind the things of true value. I quickly concluded that the thieves were servants, or, at all events, people with the privilege of residing upon the premises. Having expressed my opinion to my comrade, he laughed in his quiet way and said:

"Servants would never steal ancient-looking jewels when they could place their hands on modern things of more value in the same case—things more easily disposed of without creating suspicion."

I knew my friend and leader too well to follow the conversation then. We had been standing in one of the windows of the back drawing-room during the brief conversation recorded above, and I had noticed that he had been carefully "taking in" the features of the house.

Summoning the under-butler, I desired to see all the servants together, without causing their suspicion of my object.

As we were talking we had advanced from the back window toward the first door on the left of the drawing-room.

As we approached this door I heard a slight rustle of silk, which, from watching my companion's face, I saw he was unconscious of, so I

suddenly made a dart forward from his side, to find a tall, pale-faced girl, clad in a plain black silk robe, in the very act of listening intently to what had been passing between us. The expression of her face was not horror, but was certainly apprehensiveness, and, as I took mental note of the whole posture, and indeed picture, I said, as if the act was the most natural and commonplace in the world:

"I really beg pardon, miss."

Her first impulse seemed to be to scream, but she quickly recovered herself, assuming an expression of dignity that was somewhat imposing, or shall I say, in my own rough way, rather "taking"?

Saying, "I beg yours, sir," she turned upon her heel deliberately and walked away in quite a leisurely manner.

"I have found the thief," I said to myself, while I asked the under-butler, carelessly: "Who is that?"

"That is Miss Challis, her ladyship's companion," he answered, to my great disappointment.

At the same instant a voice was heard below us singing some foreign air, smartly, but not with voice. On turning the carved oak balustrade we came face to face with a most elegantly clad young female.

The under-butler, thinking of my first request, said:

"When will it be convenient for you to come downstairs to the servants' hall, or the housekeeper's room, Mlle. Baurette?"

"I refuse to answer," she returned. "I am no thief, and I decline to meet an abominable Bouchard even if my lady commands it," and she passed on in grand style, turning up her little nose in the air.

"And who may the young lady be?" I asked, not a little amused.

"You heard—Mademoiselle Baurette," he answered.

"But her position?"

"Her ladyship's maid."

"French?"

"No, I fancy not. I think I have heard that her real name is Barrett, but that her people went over to Paris when she was very young, to live with an English family completely settled there."

Of course, I saw the rest of the servants, but the fact is they were an unusually good and honest-looking lot. When I turned for form's sake a few questions regarding the habits of the tradesmen's assistants, and the custom in regard to the closing of the establishment, I found Mr. Poynter behind me standing beside a grave-looking young man—I was almost saying gentleman. To my intense surprise the inspector shook hands very cordially with this individual at the hall door. He seldom did this with any one he did not wish to put off his guard, so I looked closer at the man, and then thought there was something not quite satisfactory about his eyes. He was in a high good humor, so I asked him who the young fellow was.

"That," he said, impressively, "is a very superior young man. He is what is called a 'gentleman's gentleman,' and takes after his master, no doubt, who is not only a perfect gentleman, but a peer of the realm in the bargain. His

lordship, I believe," he added, quietly, "is traveling along the Rocky Mountains at present, and proposes to go to Australia by way of California, and back by way of India and the Suez Canal. His name is Samuel Johnson, and he believes himself to be the lineal descendant of an uncle of another gentleman of the same name. Samuel the second was ill when Lord Rachmore departed, so his lordship was contented with the company of a profane whisky drinking Highland gillie for the voyage."

We parted that day without expressing an opinion on it one way or the other. So as I was left to do as I pleased in the affair, I resolved to watch the ladies of the establishment—particularly Miss Challis, her ladyship's companion, and the sprightly Mlle. Baurette, the lady's maid.

I soon discovered that both the young ladies had beaux. The one who met Miss Challis, the companion, was rather gentlemanly in dress and appearance, and although they met as if by appointment near Piccadilly, on more than one occasion he boldly called at the house and remained inside for twenty-five minutes to half an hour each time.

On the second occasion I knocked after he had gone, and asking for my friend, the under-butler, soon learned that the young gentleman who had just called was Mr. Spencer, late secretary to Lord Rachmore.

One night I was going down to watch the front entrance of the house when I heard a voice that arrested my attention in a moment. It was that of the little French girl.

She was with her beau, who looked like a man who wished to hide his identity.

"And you love me very, very truly?"

"Dearly. You are to me dearer than life," returned the man, in the jolliest manner.

"Ah, you are good," she went on; "very good, even if you are poor. Never mind, you will pay me all back when we are married. To-night I also am poor, but here is a little gem upon which you can raise money."

Then the gate was opened and closed, the man returned in the same way he had come, and I, lurking in the shadows, followed him, confident that he carried one of the missing jewels in his pocket.

Walking rapidly, he crossed Piccadilly, and while he was still within easy distance of me, a string of carriages divided us. I saw him dash down by St. James' Church, but when the carriages had passed, he got so far ahead that I could not overtake him until he had disappeared into one of two doors in King street.

He was watched all night, and his house kept under close surveillance till the morning. Then I followed him to a well-known pawnbroker's in the neighborhood. I went in front, and drew the assistant's attention while he was examining the ring. I was, of course, unseen, and asked if that gentleman had ever left anything there before.

"Oh, yes!" replied the man, producing an onyx ring.

Upon the strength of that I lodged the prisoner in Vine street station, and taking the rest of the jewelry to Lady Rachmore, I soon had the satisfaction of having the onyx recognized as Louis XI.'s present to the Earl of Alloway. Much

against the lady's will I took Mlle. Baurette with me, and I must do her the justice to say that she protested her innocence the whole way to the station.

When Spencer came before the magistrate he said he found the onyx in the garden of the Rachmore House, and that the girl was innocent.

When, however, I gave my evidence, the magistrate concluded to commit both.

The grand jury threw out the bill against Miss Baurette, and I was ashamed to meet the poor little thing.

Spencer got two year's imprisonment.

Nearly three years after I was called into a house in Paddington to arrest a girl for stealing a gold chain. My surprise may be imagined when I recognized Mlle. Baurette, now as plain Miss Barrett. I would not arrest her, however, until I had seen Mr. Poynter, who was not at all satisfied by the affair. Leaving the house, I found the girl's former accomplice in crime lurking about the place.

My scruples vanished. I arrested him and the girl. In due time they were committed for trial, and the trial came on. Spencer was sentenced to penal servitude for five years, and Miss Barrett to twelve month's imprisonment.

Before I had left the court Inspector Poynter arrived, accompanied by Lord Rachmore and the good young man Samuel Johnson, who had that morning been fully committed to the Central Criminal Court, then sitting, for long-continued robberies of his lordship. Long suspected and watched, he had been arrested in flight by the inspector. His confession proved that Spencer actually found the onyx ring in the garden.

The scoundrel, concealed in the bushes, had witnessed the interviews between Mlle. Baurette and Spencer. One moonlit night he saw the former give the latter a handful of silver, which fell to the ground. The girl was afraid of being missed in the house, so Spencer saw her to the end of the walk, saying he would look for the other coins on his return. Quick as thought, the eavesdropper, who had the earliest stolen jewels with him, threw the onyx ring and a few shillings where the others had fallen, and Spencer, on his return, picked up all he found, thinking the ring intentionally placed there by the girl who loved him so foolishly.

The mystery of the missing chain was still stranger. It had been left in a room where Miss Baurette was sewing. A thunderstorm frightened her out of the apartment, and a flash of lightning, attracted by the metal, melted it instantaneously, dropping the whole of it, fused, from the mantelshelf of marble into a coal-scuttle, where the wholly childish grandfather of the family found it. Knowing the mine from which the coal had come, he had written to purchase shares in it, since gold was found plentifully in one scuttleful.

The coal-owner wrote to their agent, who communicated with the old man's son, and he elicited from the younger children that they had seen grandpa carry lumps of coal upstairs on the day of the theft. On examining the old man's room they found his prize, and Miss Baurette was completely and effectually cleared.

GOOD READING

BABE'S FOUNTAIN PEN

Babe Ruth is at least down to the level of ordinary mortals when it comes to losing fountain pens.

While Gus Dittmore was shoveling coal into his furnace he noticed a green fountain pen. It was inscribed "To Babe Ruth from the Boy Scouts, Troop 3, Burlington, Iowa." "Guaranteed for a lifetime."

The coal was mined in West Virginia and shipped here from Toledo.

STICK UP FOR BEE'S STING

Directors of the bee industries of America, in convention in Chicago, insist that there is a cure for rheumatism in bee stings.

They assert that hundreds of rheumatics who invited bees to operate on them were instantly imbued with "pep." They hopped around on erstwhile creaky legs and displayed speed in running.

The stings of the hornet and yellow jacket have not the curative properties of the honey bee.

SMITH INDORSES CAMPS

Governor Smith has written an indorsement of the 1928 military training camps in a letter to Major Gen. Hanson Ely, made public tonight.

"I hereby urge all young men residing in this State to take advantage of your offer to attend these citizens' military training camps if they can be spared from their business or schoolastic duties," said the Governor's letter which added:

"For years I have stood firmly behind this movement, believing that a real spirit of Americanism is developed in the youth who attend, making them better citizens, better sons and in time good husbands. No young man of eligible age should overlook this opportunity.

NATIONS' SHANGHAI FORCES OUT TO 10,000

The Shanghai defense force, composed of American marines and troops of Britain, France, Japan and Italy, is steadily growing smaller. From a total of 35,000 at the height of the disturbances of a year ago, which brought them here, the force is reduced to approximately 10,000 men.

A recent check-up of the men ashore from the various powers showed the United States, 1,200; Great Britain, 5,700; France, 800; Japan, 900, and Italy, 150. In addition, there are upward of 1,000 men available from various men of war in Shanghai Harbor and nearby waters.

The reduced force could be quickly augmented, however, should the need arise.

ARMY DESERTIONS GROW

Figures compiled by the Judge Advocate General for the first six months of the current fiscal year show a considerable increase in desertions from the army. Should the ratio continue until June 30 it is stated that desertions will be more

numerous than for many years, despite the fact that enlisted personnel now receives an increased ration, which was expected to cut down the number of disaffected.

Adj. Gen. Wahl told the Senate Appropriation Committee the latest figures indicate an 8.25 rate of desertion, compared with the highest rate of 7.39 in recent years.

"OLD IRONSIDES" FUND PASSES HALF MILLION

Contributions to the fund for the rebuilding of the frigate Constitution, "Old Ironsides," have passed the half million mark, it was announced recently by Rear Admiral Philip D. Andrews, Commandant of the Boston Navy Yard; originally it was estimated that \$748,000 would be required to restore the historic ship, but it is now thought a lower estimate may be possible.

In the campaign for funds, which is about two-thirds ended, the National Committee has reached approximately 45,000,000 persons, Admiral Andrews said. Most of the \$501,000 that has been raised has come from the sale of pictures of the ship and of souvenirs made from the original hull of the Constitution. The committee hopes to end the campaign by July 1.

"The completed Constitution will be the personal possession of the people of this country," Admiral Andrews said, "and her rebuilding should be entirely a result of their contributions. Up to now donations have not actually been solicited but they are welcome."

300-MILE AIR MAIL BEACON FOR CHICAGO ON 1,320-FOOT TOWER, WORLD'S HIGHEST

Elmer G. Sperry, head of the Sperry Gyroscope Company of Brooklyn, has donated to the City of Chicago what will be the largest aeronautical beacon in the world, according to announcement here recently by National Air Transport officials. The revolving searchlight will develop 1,200,000,000 candle power and is to be erected on a 1,320-foot tower atop a Chicago Loop skyscraper, yet to be selected, at a total cost of \$2,000,000.

Topping by more than 300 feet the famous Eiffel Tower, at present the highest structure in the world, this giant beacon will have a lens 63 inches in diameter and flash its rays 250 to 300 miles for the guidance of night flyers. Mr. Sperry is quoted as saying it will be possible to read a newspaper by the light of the new beacon at a distance of thirty miles.

On clear nights mail flyers leaving Cleveland for Chicago will "pick up" the beacon after the first eighteen miles and will be able to fly by it the next three hours at the present air mail speed of 100 miles an hour. The standard revolving beacons heretofore on the air mail route are 2,000,000 candle power and visible from forty to seventy miles.

The searchlight recently installed on the Hotel St George in Brooklyn by the Sperry Company has 480,000,000 candle power. The Chicago beacon will be put in operation within the next six months, it is promised.

CURRENT NEWS

HOUSE FOR CHEAP AIR MAIL

The Kelly bill, authorizing a reduction of the air mail postage rate and extending air mail route contracts, was passed recently by the House and sent to the Senate. The air mail postage rate under the measure would be reduced from 10 cents a half ounce to 5 cent an ounce.

Earlier in the day the measure had been objected to by Representative La Guardia (R., N. Y.), although Representative Kelly (R., Pa.), its author, said it was approved by Col. Lindberg.

Kelly obtained action on the bill under a suspension of the rules just before the House adjourned.

FERRYBOAT BOILER BURSTS

The ferryboat Bird S. Coler, which plies between 125th Street, Manhattan, and Randall's Island, was disabled recently when one of her boilers exploded after she had been tied to her slip at the Island.

The ferryboat had discharged her passengers and was being made ready for her night's mooring. The lines had been made fast and her fires banked when the explosion occurred. Investigating, the crew found that one boiler had exploded and the engineroom was ablaze. The fire was put out in a few minutes with hand extinguishers. Damage was slight.

BIRTHPLACE OF NATIONAL ANTHEM TO BE SHRINE

Congress has provided an appropriation of \$81,678 for restoration and preservation of Fort McHenry, Md., birthplace of "The Star-Spangled Banner."

The authorization will serve ultimately to provide a splendid national monument commemorating the defense of Fort McHenry against the bombardment of the British fleet in 1814, and the birth of the American national anthem.

While the original flagstaff on which the Stars and Stripes flew long since has disappeared, the flag still flies over the identical spot on which Francis Scott Key viewed it from the British vessel whereon he was detained.

U. S. TOURISTS STOPPED BY SMALLPOX IN BEIRUT

An epidemic of smallpox in Syria cut in half the Holy Land tour of 2,000 American tourists when they were forbidden to land here from the steamship Doric and Rotterdam.

Beirut has been placed under strict quarantine. According to Dr. Wilson Dodd, of Montclair, N. J., director of the American Near-East Relief here, the epidemic started a fortnight ago in the refugee camps and spread rapidly. Up to March 1 some 105 cases had been reported, with twenty-two deaths.

Dr. Dodd and American nurses have vaccinated the 3,000 children in American orphanages here

and all of the American personnel, numbering about fifty, in the Near-East Relief and in the American College.

The French authorities have undertaken the wholesale vaccination of the city population.

PET RACCOON FLEES TO SAFETY

A raccoon, which has been leading a strenuous urban existence as a pet of Miss Laura B. Garrett, educator and naturalist, of No. 3941 Caroline Street, Sunnyside Gardens, Long Island City, making trips about the country in Pullmans, riding in subways and what not, grew tired of it all recently and hid away in a hole in the attic floor for what seems likely to be a long winter sleep.

Nothing which Miss Garrett has tried to lure Mr. Raccoon from the bliss of deep oblivion, safe from the hum of traffic, has succeeded. Choice morsels of food remain untouched at the opening of the hole, which a carpenter, who was repairing the floor, neglected to cover.

Miss Garrett added the raccoon some time ago to an assortment of pets that included an eight-foot gopher snake, a lizard, turtles, snails and pigeons. She has transported the whole family as far as Chicago in a Pullman car on a lecture trip. Recently the raccoon was treated to a ride in the subway. He created a commotion by reaching out and pinching the leg of the woman who sat next.

Miss Garrett is undecided whether to leave the raccoon to quiet slumber or rip up the floor and take him back to its barrel shelter in the cellar.

CHAIN OF AIRPORTS FROM MAINE TO FLORIDA

A system of high grade locally backed airports covering the entire coast from Maine to Florida will be linked up under the operation of National Airway Terminals, Inc., of No. 292 Madison Avenue, it was revealed recently in the announcement of plans for the Portland, Me., airport as No. 1 in the project.

William E. Arthur, President of the William E. Arthur Company, airport constructors; C. S. ("Casey") Jones, Vice President of the Curtiss Flying Service; H. C. Ferguson, World War flyer and former member of Capt. Georges Guynemer's famous squadron, and O. C. Kidney are the principal officers of the operating company. C. M. Keys, President of the Curtiss Aeorplane and Motor Company, is a director.

Each airport will provide flying instruction, day and night passenger flights, and sightseeing flights and demonstrations by expert personnel. The Curtiss Flying Service will supervise the Portland field, as well as No. 2, now under construction at Bridgeport. Field No. 3 will probably be at Wilmington, Del.

The Portland airport has three 3,200 foot runways and a ten-plane hangar, and is the first in New England completely equipped with boundary, beacon and approach lights. It will be ready for operation as soon as weather permits.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

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